DVD ROM

GIANT DEMO DVD

YAKUZA

GOD OF WAR · KILLZONE
PLUS 6 MORE!

OFFICIAL U.S.
PlayStation
MAGAZINE

1UP NETWORK

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 107 (August 2006)

FINAL FANTASY

EXCLUSIVE HANDS-ON WITH U.S. FFXII
NEW PICS, INFO ON FFXIII
PLUS MUCH MORE!

+

PS3 SNEAK PEEKS:
RAINBOW SIX VEGAS · TUROK · MGS4

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SONY'S PS3 CONTROLLER

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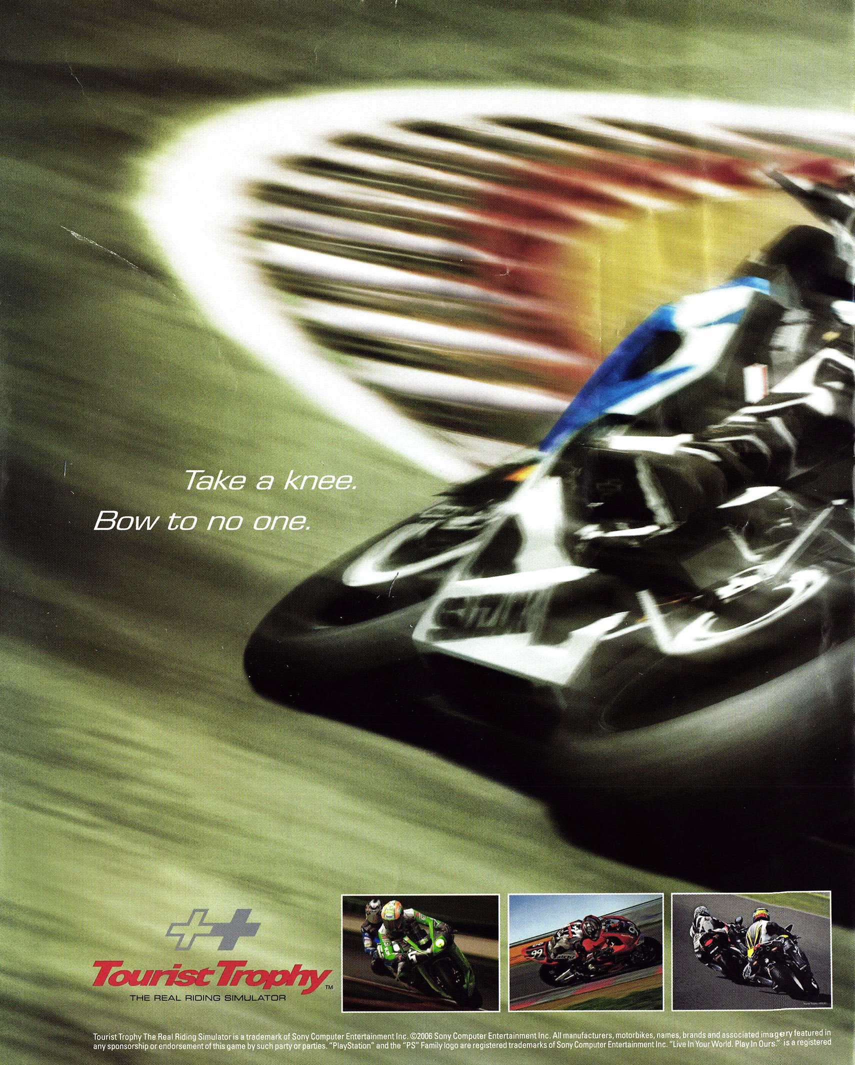
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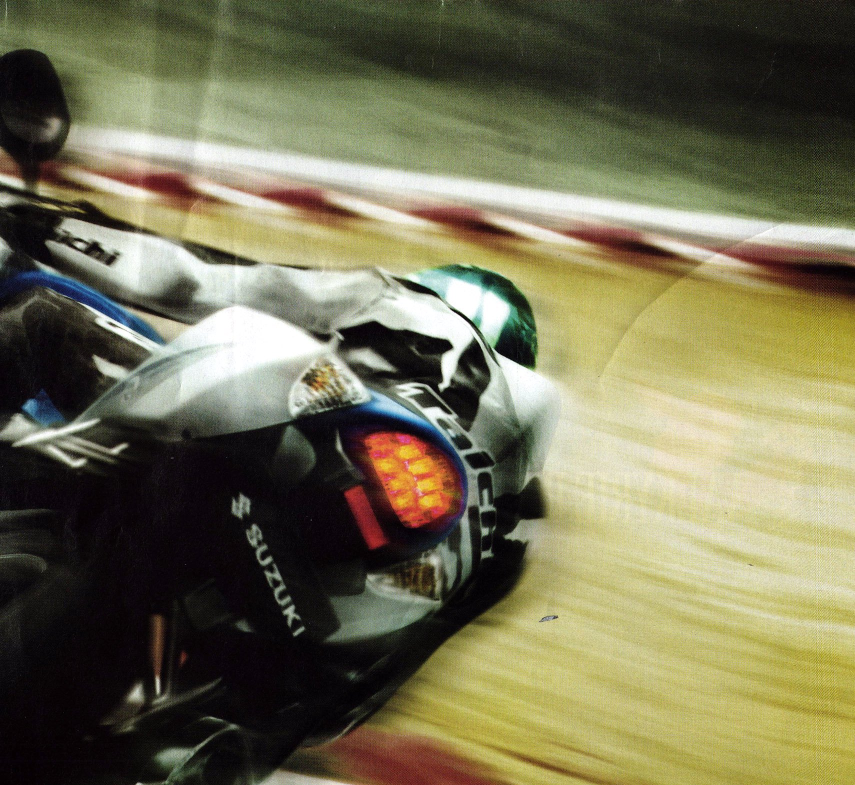

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PlayStation®2

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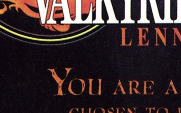

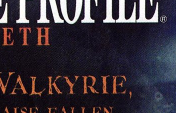

PSP
PlayStation Portable

SQUARE ENIX
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Published by Square Enix, Inc.

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CONTENT RATED BY
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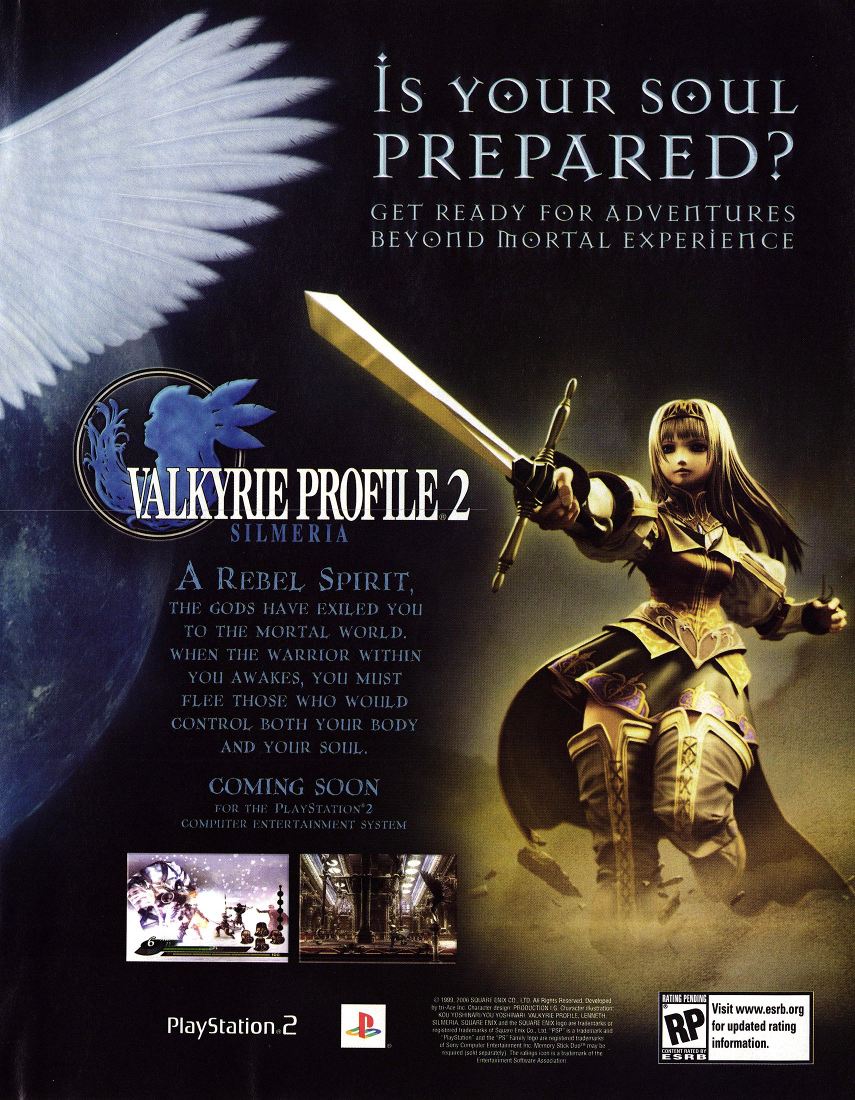
Fantasy Violence
Language
Suggestive Themes
Use of Alcohol



IS YOUR SOUL PREPARED?

GET READY FOR ADVENTURES
BEYOND MORTAL EXPERIENCE

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SILMERIA

A REBEL SPIRIT,
THE GODS HAVE EXILED YOU
TO THE MORTAL WORLD.
WHEN THE WARRIOR WITHIN
YOU AWAKES, YOU MUST
FLEE THOSE WHO WOULD
CONTROL BOTH YOUR BODY
AND YOUR SOUL.

COMING SOON
FOR THE PLAYSTATION®2
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PlayStation®2

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RP
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YAKUZA
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OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE

FINAL FANTASY
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FINAL FANTASY

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The development studio that's got it made.

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Dinosaurs and Special Ops! Sadly, not in the same game.

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Join the Asian mafia or fight with the Force.

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Don't like the *Final Fantasy* series? Never fear—you've got a slew of other options.

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The men who made *Final Fantasy* great.

92 THE OPPOSITE OF FUN
Trust us, you do *not* want to play these.

94 THE LOST WEEKEND
Rental store + 72 hours + 10 games = Fun

97 GREATEST HITS
Awesome games, only $20 each.

97 PS1-DERLAND
To buy or to rent?

P.S.

98 IN MY DAY
Don't be such a hater.

OPM.1UP.COM

What goes hand in hand with videogames? Why, comics, of course! Which is why we are very excited about the festival of Comicon awesomeness that's coming to 1UP on July 17. Stay tuned for a full week of up-to-the-minute news, exclusive interviews, and the always-entertaining photos of attendees.

Also check out an in-depth look at Q Entertainment, the company started by last month's *OPM* Interview subject Tetsuya Mizuguchi. Get the lowdown on his upcoming titles for the PSP and what the company has in store for the next generation.

Lastly, stop by joepm.1UP.com and wish everybody's favorite senior editor Mr. Rybicki a happy anniversary, as he celebrates 10 years with *OPM*. In that time, he's seen more than 2,200 titles on three different systems covered in this magazine. That's a whole lotta games.

GAMES
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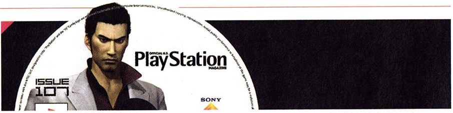
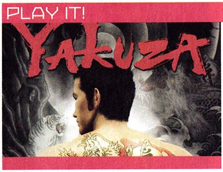
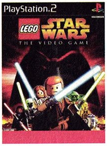


PLAY IT!



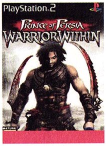
YAKUZA

In a society where respect and honor hold great importance, there is an even higher regard for these traits within the one organization most feared by all: the yakuza. Delve into this world on this month's exclusive demo: Visit the illicit haunts of Tokyo and test your mettle in some deadly fighting, try your luck in the casino, or chat up the lovely ladies at the Hostess bar.



LEGO STAR WARS

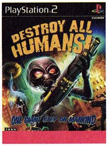
Lego Star Wars struck gold with its tongue-in-cheek look at the prequels. Sample it here before we hit you with a demo of the exciting sequel next month!



PRINCE OF PERSIA: WARRIOR WITHIN

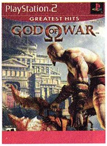
The second game in the trilogy challenged us with its deeper combat and longer story. Play along as the old Prince learns some mad skillz.

PLAY IT!



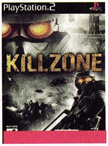
DESTROY ALL HUMANS!

Take '50s camp, mix with an alien invader, and stir in some cow tipping, anal probing, and a giant conspiracy. What more could you ask for?



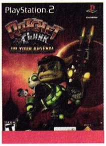
GOD OF WAR

So much has been said about how much Kratos kicks serious ass that we don't really need to say anything here. We'll just let the game speak for itself.



KILLZONE

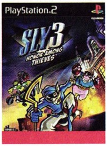
Choose from three different characters, then drop into the slums of Vetka as you search for the missing ISA Colonel while fending off the Helghast.



RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

Load up on some platform mayhem with multiple single-player levels or challenge up to three of your buddies in the Hoven Gorge multiplayer map.

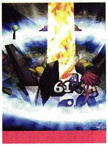
PLAY IT!



SLY 3: HONOR AMONG THIEVES

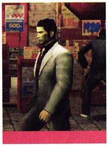
This packed demo offers a ton, allowing you play through three different missions and sample the new multiplayer mode from Sly's latest outing.

WATCH IT!



DISGAEA 2: CURSED MEMORIES

With quirky humor, an involved character creation, and a challenging combat with a deep battle system, this gem of an RPG aims to please.



YAKUZA

Go beyond the demo with this behind-the-scenes look at Kiryu Kazuma, who is caught in an underworld plot involving a mysterious girl and a missing 100 billion yen.

COMING NEXT MONTH!

THINK YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES TO JOIN THE YAKUZA?

One of the things on which we pride ourselves is bringing you the latest and greatest demos the gaming world has to offer. That's one of the benefits of reading the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, which you are holding right here in your hands.

This month, we take you to Japan's criminal underground with *Yakuza*. Sample what promises to be an accurate portrayal of the powerful and far-reaching Japanese criminal underworld with this exclusive demo.

Also, to celebrate the latest additions to Sony's Greatest Hits library, we thought we'd offer you a sampling of these classics in case you missed out on them the first time around.

So, what are you waiting for? Grab the disc and get to your PlayStation 2.

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President Katherine Williams
Technical Director Tim Edwards

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DISC PROBLEMS?

Did you buy a copy of our magazine that did not contain a demo DVD? Simply send the receipt in an envelope marked "OPM Replacement Disc" to OPM Disc Producer, Ziff Davis Media, 101 2nd Street, San Francisco, CA 94105, with the name and address of the store plus your phone number and address and we'll send you the disc. Make sure you specify which month the corresponding disc belongs to in order to ensure you get the right one. If you have a malfunctioning or nonworking demo disc, call EDS at 1-800-627-6458. They will provide instructions to obtain repair or replacement services. Sony Computer Entertainment America (SCEA) warrants to the original purchaser of the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine* that the demo disc included is free from defects in material and workmanship for a period of ninety (90) days from the date of purchase. SCEA agrees for a period of ninety (90) days to either repair or replace, at its option, the SCEA product. You must call EDS at 1-800-627-6458 to receive instructions to obtain repair/replacement services. This warranty shall not be applicable and shall be void if the defect in the SCEA product has arisen through abuse, unreasonable use, mistreatment, neglect, or breakage during shipment. THIS WARRANTY IS IN LIEU OF ALL OTHER WARRANTIES AND NO OTHER REPRESENTATIONS OR CLAIMS OF ANY NATURE SHALL BE BINDING ON OR OBLIGATE SCEA. ANY IMPLIED WARRANTIES APPLICABLE TO THIS SOFTWARE PRODUCT, INCLUDING WARRANTIES OF MERCHANTABILITY AND FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE, ARE LIMITED TO THE NINETY (90) DAY PERIOD DESCRIBED ABOVE. IN NO EVENT WILL SCEA BE LIABLE FOR INCIDENTAL OR CONSEQUENTIAL DAMAGES RESULTING FROM POSSESSION, USE, OR MALFUNCTION OF THE SCEA SOFTWARE PRODUCT.

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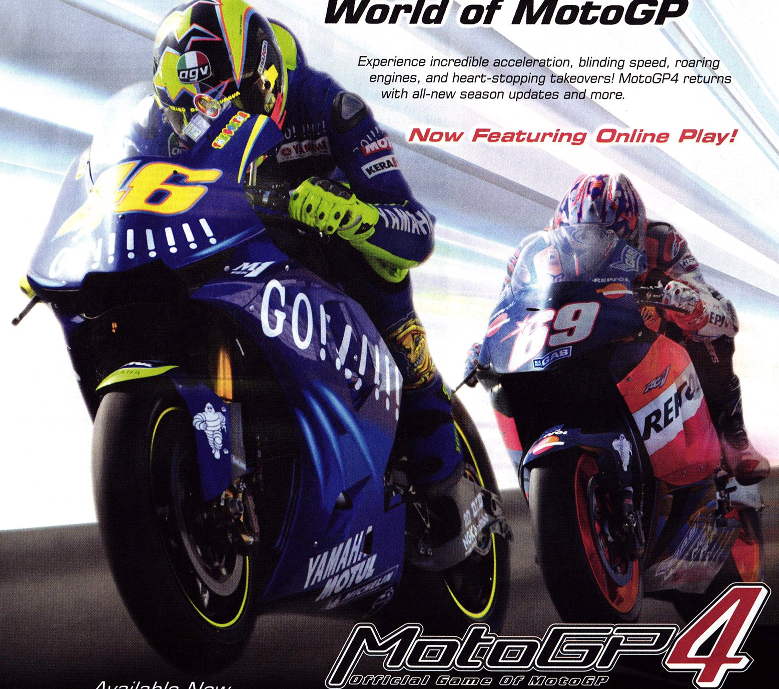
Now Featuring Online Play!



MotoGP4

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Conquer all three engine classes including 125cc, 250cc, and MotoGP.

Create your own rider or race as your favorite professional rider.

Test your skills and talk trash with online competitors for the first time ever.

GRAND PRIX CIRCUIT

Speed through 16 official tracks from around the world and more!

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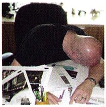
THE OPM FAMILY

TOM BYRON

While Joe was out of town, Tom pulled a Rich Little and guest-hosted an episode of RadiOPM, the official podcast of your favorite PlayStation magazine (radiopm.1UP.com). Tom had a lot of fun, but as Dana pointed out, "It felt like when a substitute teacher comes in for the day." Yeah, the *OPM* kids were a little rambunctious, but they all made it through and maybe learned a little something about themselves in the process. The good news? Joe came back! And Tom bets you don't remember who Rich Little is.

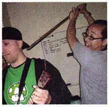
DANA JONGEWAARD

has decided to play hooky from work for a while, but she's got her stand-in all set, so no one will even notice that she's gone. At least, not until all the pages from the issue end up rolling down the office hallway in a huge ball....



JOE RYBICKI

has been working for *OPM* (and its predecessor, *P.S.X.*) for an almost incomprehensible 10 years this month. That's something on the order of 12,000 pages of magazine to have come across his desk. Good thing they didn't all come across his desk at the same time.



THIERRY NGUYEN

has played so much *FFXII* that it has influenced him to start shanking fellow staffers. He figures if you can shank people and become king, surely you can shank editors and become the new EIC. So expect the October issue to be Scooterrific!

GIANCARLO VARANINI

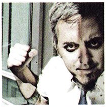
is sad that he only has 17 minutes to write this bio. If given more time, he could probably write the next great American novel, but nooooo! OK, someone's also cranky because there aren't any Animal Crackers left in the vending machine.

LOGAN PARR

downloaded the *LocoRoco* demo for his PSP and is totally addicted. He imagines this is how his blood cells behave in his body when having to get from Point A to Point B. Maybe that explains why we hear the theme song whenever we stand near him.

RYAN VULK

would have been excited about this month's cover story, except for the fact that Melkor doesn't recognize the existence of any *Final Fantasy* game beyond *FFXI*. Perhaps if all future *FF* releases were massively multiplayer online games, he'd be more interested.



ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA

is thrilled about finishing this issue so he'll have time to attend to his child and his 1UP blog. He has described the joy of having a child as similar to owning a mech made up of 1,000,236 goldfish. Also, he has added cannibalism to his to-do list.

EXTENDED FAMILY

JAMES MIELKE

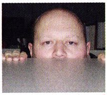
shares with the world his disturbingly extensive knowledge of Japan's bizarro world of pop culture as the writer of J-Town. We're a-scared. No, really.
milkman.1UP.com

PATRICK JOYNT

likes playing soccer games, but not as much as he likes downing a dozen Coronas, watching World Cup action, and crying like a baby when his team loses.
halofire.1UP.com

ROBERT ASHLEY

comes from Texas, where they grow their game reviewers tall and snarky. He also makes music in not one, but two different bands. He's multifunctional like that.
robertashley.1UP.com



GREG SEWART

hails from the same country cold comes from: Canada. He worked for *OPM*'s sister mag, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, for years before joining, and then leaving, the game-design community.
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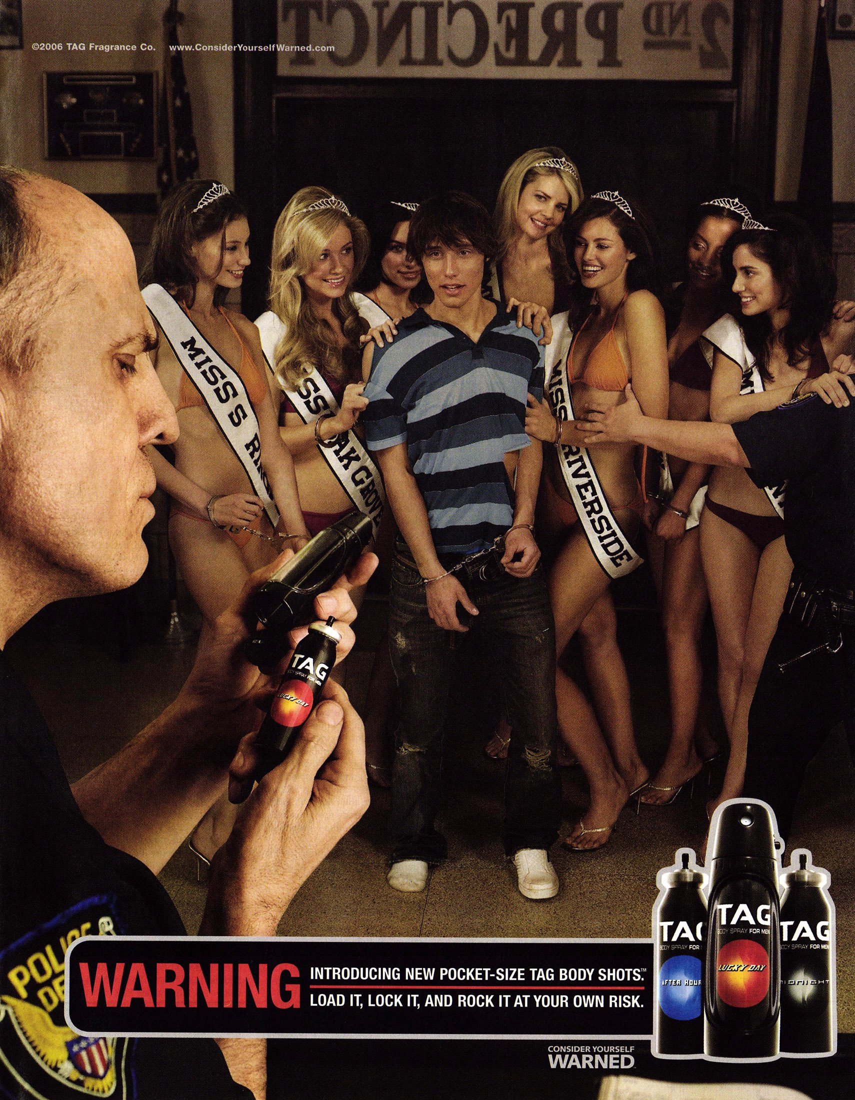
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10 PS3 GAMES

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

NEBRASKA? IS THAT ONE OF THEM THERE FORMER SOVIET UNIONS?

I live in Nebraska, and the only thing more irritating than being asked "What country is that in?" is the lack of videogame coverage in our state. I live in a rural area that doesn't have much to offer for nearby entertainment—"nearby" meaning anything within one hour's driving time. So after work, family, and outdoor recreation, most of us are multiconsole homes. But no PlayStation booth at the Comstock concert series. It's a big enough series that Pepsi bought a waterslide for it. I know all the big gaming events are going to stay on the East and West Coasts, but it would be nice to see a little something in the middle of the country. I have looked for events in the area, but being a dad of two, I can't always go to Ozzfest in Kansas. If I am missing out on something, please let me know.

Tony Taylor
Via e-mail

GOING MICROSOFT ON SONY

For the first time in my gaming life, I am actually considering making a change from the PlayStation. When the PS2 came out, I was pumped to get it: It would play DVDs and my old PS1 games—so, of course, I bought it. After the fact, I have never played a PS1 game on it, and I may have watched one DVD. In other words, the backward compatibility and the DVD player do not mean much to me. I will say that playing my games in high-def will be good, because I have the TV for it. Also, online gaming is very important to me. The price of the PS3, though, has me thinking of changing to the Xbox 360. It's cheaper, it's proven, and it's going to be a lot easier to get your hands on one when the PS3 comes out. I can afford to buy the PS3, but why should I? I have been as loyal to the PlayStation as anyone, and I'm sure the PS3 will be an outstanding system, but so is the 360. I am still holding out some hope that Sony will bring down the price of the PS3 before its launch, but if they don't, this could be the end for Sony—at least for me.

Roger in South Texas
Via e-mail

A LARGE NUT?

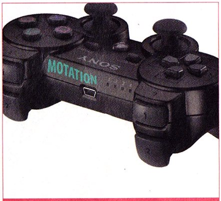
I bought an Xbox 360 today. Being a 40-year-old father of two (ages 8 and 7), 600 bucks is a large nut to bust on myself. The way I justify the Xbox purchase to myself is that I will spend the extra 200 beans I save by getting the kids the Nintendo Wii. I get a next-gen console, and the kids think I'm the greatest dad ever. Win-win. I have to admit, I am disappointed with the PS3 pricing. When the PS2 was introduced as a game console/DVD player, most people had VCRs, and a PS2 was a no-brainer upgrade. In this case, a PS3/Blu-ray DVD player is an upgrade that I can wait for the prices to drop on [before I make the] purchase.

In my opinion, Sony lost sight that the PlayStation is a game console first.

tRaKtT13, Florida
Via e-mail

HOW ABOUT BRINGING BACK THE RUMBLE FEATURE AND CALLING IT DUALSHOCK 2?

Someone on radiOPM (OPM's podcast) talked about making up a name for the PS3 controller. I have a few ideas. The first is the Freedom controller, since it offers six degrees of freedom. The second is a little more normal: the Dual Motation (for MOtion and roTATION) controller, or simply Dual Movement, since the controller is still the current DualShock—minus the shock.



William Goodman
Via e-mail

PS'D OFF

I'm reading everywhere about how the PS3's really not that expensive and that people are still going to buy it because of what it can do. Can someone please send me some of their money-tree seeds, because I need to get them planted right away. I don't care if it's affordable compared with other Blu-ray disc players right now; Sony is asking too much for the PS3. Need I remind you it's their new game console? And I don't buy anyone's trying to pass off this generation of game consoles more as multimedia machines, because everyone who has a PS2 or an Xbox in their home likely already has a PC or Mac in their home as well. The main focus with the entire machine appears to be that it will play Blu-ray discs. That may or may not even be the next format that catches on. Does anyone remember Betamax videotapes? Digital audio tapes? Audio minidiscs? Heck, DVD audio doesn't appear to be making any great strides! My game console should play videogames, play videogames online, and play movies—not play movie discs that aren't widely distributed yet that may or may not be obsolete by the end of the console's life cycle. When the PS2 came out, it was an easy sell because DVDs were already on the shelves and showing VHS tapes the way to the door. One could easily justify buying one because the price was similar to that of previous consoles and it was a bargain when one considered that it was a DVD player, which were more expensive at the time, and a next-generation game console all contained in a beautiful black box. I guess, like Scooter [*OPM* editor Thierry Nguyen], I, too, will be buying my new PS3 in 2010 (if Sony hasn't driven me to get an Xbox 360 by then).

Joe Van Galder
Mesa, AZ

JOHN SCALZI IS WRONG

In response to John Scalzi's column "Sticker Shock" (The Big Picture, OPM #105, July 2006), I disagree that the price is too high. We aren't just getting a gaming system; we're getting a Blu-ray player that will also be able to browse the Internet, which makes it very much like a PC. In terms of comparing this to the best gaming PC on the market, I would say the PS3 is a bargain.

Kris W.
Via e-mail

JOHN SCALZI IS RIGHT

Regarding John Scalzi's "Sticker Shock" column: First off, I agree with him in the sense that he doesn't really approve of the PS3 overall. I don't like the thing one bit, and I think that Sony has taken it too far in regard to gaming. Isn't the primary function of a videoGAME console supposed to be GAMING?!

It seems to me that the PS3 is going to be more of an office assistant than any type of game console. I am a gamer and nothing more, and I think that Sony had a fantastic idea to appeal to more than just gamers, but again, I think they overdid it just a tad. Six-hundred dollars is not worth converting to the new generation, no matter what the PS3 can do.

Steven
Via e-mail

JOHN SCALZI IS RIGHTER

I completely agree with John Scalzi on the price of the PS3. I'm a big fan of games, but I'm only going on 14. There's no way I could make that amount of money, nor is there any way I could convince my parents to pay that much for a game system. I'll admit that even though the features available with the PS3 will be welcomed with open arms, as will the return of the DualShock and DualShock 2 formats for the controller, along with the games available just at launch, $600 is a price only [affordable] for the true addicts who devote their money to gaming. There are a good number of them, but I doubt that there's enough to keep Sony out of the red.

P.S. While people in their late teens and 20s may make up the majority of the gaming market, people under 16 also make up a good chunk of the crowd. And most of those teens aren't rich from their allowances.

White-Raptor
Jacksonville, FL

MOWING FOR GAMES

People need to stop complaining about how much the PS3 is going to cost and just get over it. A few people writing letters to a magazine whining about how much they're going to have to spend will not convince Sony to lower the price. Half the people writing letters to complain say they're not going to buy one. Hey, if you don't plan on getting one, then what is the point in writing a letter about how much it will cost? If you aren't buying one, then it won't cost you anything, so just be quiet! I saved for a year just to buy my PSP (I'm 14 and don't really have a job), and even after that, I went gameless for three months. I have been putting money toward the PS3 since I got my PSP, and I am still nowhere near my goal. Between buying a PS3 ($600) and getting a game ($60-$90), I have to come up with like $550 in five months. Just thinking about all the lawn-mower riding I'll have to do to make that money. I could kick somebody with a job for complaining. Oh, and if anyone wants to donate to my PS3 fund, just e-mail me at [*Oops, sorry—ran out of room. —Ed.*]

toolfan9000
Via e-mail

OOPS!

Thanks to the alert readers who noticed that our reviews of *Naruto: Ultimate Ninja* and *X-Men: The Official Game* (*OPM* #106, July 2006) featured the incorrect screenshots.

RADIOPM

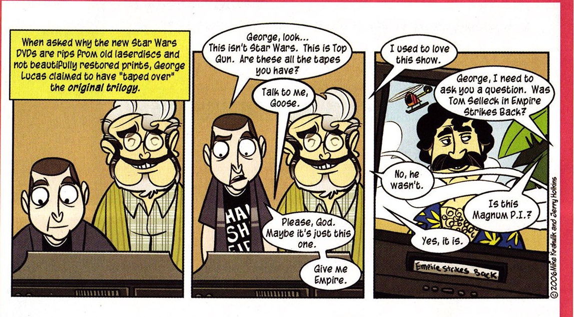
BEHIND THE SCENES AND BEYOND THE PAGES OF THE OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE

RADIOPM IS ON THE AIR!

Do you run your fingers over the pages of *OPM* and hope that the ink somehow starts talking to you with the sweet, dulcet tones of the *OPM* staff? That's never going to happen, but something pretty close happens when you go to radiopm.1UP.com and listen to the RadiOPM podcast. We won't merely rehash the magazine (after all, that's what the mag is for), but we will discuss breaking PlayStation news of the week, read some staff poetry, go pop-culture crazy when we finish our monthly deadline, and respond to reader questions (submitted via e-mail, the fan club at radiopm-club.1up.com, or the *OPM* message board at boards.1up.com). Plus, we now update every Thursday instead of every Monday!

PENNY ARCADE

PENNY-ARCADE.COM


When asked why the new Star Wars DVDs are rips from old laserdiscs and not beautifully restored prints, George Lucas claimed to have "taped over" the original trilogy.
George, look... This isn't Star Wars. This is Top Gun. Are these all the tapes you have?
Talk to me, Goose.
Please, God. Maybe it's just this one.
Give me Empire.
I used to love this show.
George, I need to ask you a question. Was Tom Selleck in Empire Strikes Back?
No, he wasn't.
Is this Magnum P.I.?
Yes, it is.
Empire Strikes Back
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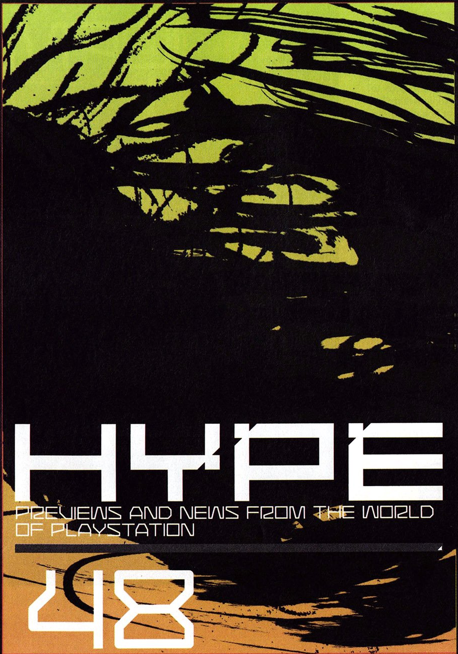

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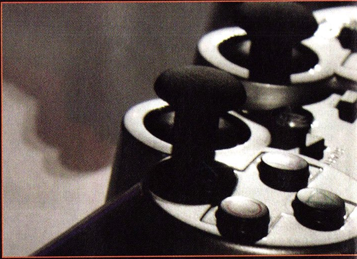


out OF control

Gimmick. Not a gimmick. Whatever your thoughts are on the PlayStation 3 controller or how Sony introduced it to the world, the fact that it uses motion-sensing technology is a sign that games and game design may be heading in a new direction. But it's not like the technology is brand new. Not only has it existed since the 1980s, but the original PlayStation even had a motion sensor control that was manufactured by a third party company, and as you can see, the idea didn't really stick. So what makes the PlayStation 3 controller any different? For one, the technology is included in the controller that's packed into the system, so everyone's on a level playing field. Developers know that they can incorporate a feature that supports the motion sensor capabilities and that everyone will be able to experience it. That's a huge difference and one that will help usher in a new era of game control.

THE ROUND TABLE

TOP DEVELOPERS GIVE THEIR THOUGHTS ON SONY'S NEW CONTROLLER.

Ever wonder what developers think of the new PlayStation 3 controller? Well, wonder no more! We spoke with several key developers currently working with the PlayStation 3 to not only get their thoughts on the controller itself, but also their opinions as to what sort of an effect that it will have on the industry as a whole.

Atushi Inaba, President of Clover Studios, currently working on the North American version of *Okami* for the PlayStation 2.

Larry LaPierre , Executive Producer at EA Vancouver, currently working on *Need for Speed: Carbon* for the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation 3.

Randy Pitchford, President of Gearbox Software, currently working on *Brothers In Arms: Hell's Highway* for the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation 3.

Yasuo Daikai, Producer at Konami, currently working on *Coded Arms: Assault* for the PlayStation 3.

Neil Glancy, Lead Designer at Midway, currently working on *Stranglehold* for the Xbox 360 and the PlayStation 3.

Brian Upton, Senior Designer at Incognito, currently working on *Warhawk* for the PlayStation 3.

Derek Littlewood, Creative Director at Free Radical, currently working on *Haze* for the PlayStation 3.

Noriyuki Shimoda, Producer at Sega, currently working on *Virtua Fighter 5* for the PlayStation 3.

Hiroyuki Kobayashi, Producer at Capcom, currently working on Devil May Cry 4 for the PlayStation 3.

OUT OF CONTROL

what was your first reaction to the controller?

Atsushi Inaba I'm happy they're using the same design as before because it's a controller that both developers and users are accustomed to. The motion sensor technology will be a useful subfunction. However, effectively implementing that function in a game lies in the hands of the developer. Yet if we obsess too much over this technology, it may interfere with the actual game creation. Therefore, it's probably best if we use it to enhance the gaming experience without [letting] it dominating the entire design.

Larry LaPierre I was pleasantly surprised; any time you have a new way to interface [with] interactive gaming it's big news. It means fresh challenges for the dev team and, more importantly, new experiences for all us gamers.

Randy Pitchford Mixed feelings—excited to have new interfaces to consider, excited that the things that worked about the classic DualShock design are being embraced, but a little sad to lose vibration feedback. I understand the trade-offs they were dealing with, though.

does it force you to think differently about game design?

Hiroyuki Kobayashi It doesn't force us to think differently about game design, per se. We have the potential to create games using the technology but we don't have to force ourselves to come up with one.

Brian Upton I think it will change some genres a lot. The amount of analog control data you can get out of a standard controller stick is actually pretty limited—there's just not that [wide a] range of motion. That's why a lot of hardcore gamers in the current generation use add-on steering wheels or joysticks. Now that sort of fine analog control will be standard straight out of the box. That's going to have a big effect on any game where you're pointing or steering.

Randy Pitchford Because the overall design of the controller [is] fundamentally an iteration of what we've grown to know and love, I don't think we're forced to rethink input from the ground up for the kinds of games we're used to making. Instead, we have a clever option that we can consider to enhance the experience in interesting ways. Beyond that, there is opportunity to imagine an entirely new kind of game that focuses on the new input. That kind of approach is all about thinking differently, but it isn't forces—it's a choice for developers who want to try it. I look forward to seeing what comes from that kind of thinking.

will the motion sensory technology change gaming?

Yasuo Daikai Whether this technology will change gaming depends on how we as game developers utilize this feature. And will it change gaming? I think that's more up to the consumers if they will accept new types of gameplay using this technology. At least that's what I think with existing game genres.

Neil Glancy I Personally, as a game designer I see the new tilt functionality as a great way to add aftertouch to standard play mechanics. Stranglehold isn't a flying game like Warhawk, but we could still experiment with some neat things that tilting allows us to do. For example, in Stranglehold Tequila can do these really neat dives onto rolling objects and ride them across areas, all the while taking out guys all around him. One of the things we identified early on in prototyping this feature was that is was neat to be able to influence the rolling cart's direction slightly, give it English, if you will. The tilt sensor in the PS3 pad might be an interesting way of allowing users to shift their weight in this manner.

what would you change about the controller?

Derek Littlewood I've always been a fan of the DualShock; yeah, the sensitivity on the sticks isn't perfect but I personally find the symmetrical layout a lot more ergonomic than any of the competition. Trying to reinvent the wheel when designing a new controller is simply asking to confuse the player. It's a bit like TV remote controls; why the hell doesn't somebody establish some sort of standard for them? Having to examine all the buttons and desperately try [to] figure out how to operate every new remote you ever come across is just plain annoying (although maybe that's just me getting old). Sony established a pretty decent standard with the DualShock; I can see why they're not in a rush to alter it too much.

Larry LaPierre I can only speculate at this point, but I suspect we will have to spend a lot of time dealing with the sensitivity of the controls—too sensitive and you won't feel in control, [but] if it's not sensitive enough then it won't feel responsive enough. The other challenge will be in sorting out context-sensitive movements. It could be like some of the early PDA writing recognition software, which was finicky. The key will be to keep it simple in the beginning and then see where we can go with things as we begin to think differently about the interaction with our games.

Randy Pitchford Mixed feelings—excited to have new interfaces, excited that the things that worked about the classic DualShock design are being embraced, but a little sad to lose vibration feedback. I understand the trade-offs they were dealing with, though.

Noriyuki Shimoda It is unfortunate that the PS3 controller won't have a vibrate function as that's become a standard and expected feature with videogame controllers.

will this draw games away from the Nintendo Wii since so many seemed interested in its motion sensor capabilities?

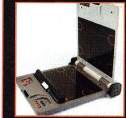
Randy Pitchford I'm not sure these things will have any effect on one another. Multiplatform developers at this stage will be excited about any new toys we can play with, but we really need to understand what kind of audiences are attracted to these platforms before we make alignment decisions one way or another. However, I think it's really great to have motion-based input technology in more than one platform. Gives developers like Gearbox lots of flexibility in making the games we want to make for the audience that wants what we're doing.

Noriyuki Shimoda At first glance, there are a lot similarities [between] the next-gen controllers, but if you take a closer look you will realize the technology is actually quite different. Each technology or game system has its fan base of gamers. Developers will look at each technology, take into account [its] features, and decide what to support based on the games and their needs.

Derek Littlewood You mean they might be 'taking the Wii?' Ahaha. Ahahahaha. No? Well, to be honest with you, there're a lot of differences between the systems, not least the performance gap between the two. I think most of the people who want to be working with the PS3 already are.

controllers that worked...or didn't

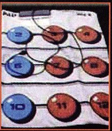
The PlayStation had its own fair share of gimmicky controllers, most of which were manufactured by Namco. But controllers with "cool" abilities aren't anything new to the videogame industry. The controllers below are just a few that have graced—or in some cases, disgraced—consoles over the years, and part of the reason why they never took off is because they weren't system pack-ins.



NINTENDO U-FORCE

How Does It Work?
You controlled onscreen action by moving your hands in different directions.

Did It Work?
Oh hell no! Control via the U-Force was spotty at best. Plus, not only was the device enormous, but doing wax-on, wax-off movements was also embarrassing.



NINTENDO POWER PAD

How Does It Work?
Basically stomp up and down on buttons laid out on a mat-style pad.

Did It Work?
Actually, yes. Think of it as a precursor to all the *DDR* pads you see at there. It was great for games that required quick movement—like the Track and Field series—but it wasn't quite as useful for anything outside of that.

NAMCO NEGCON

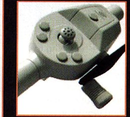
How Does It Work?
You steer and control general direction by twisting the control up and down, sort of like the throttle on a motorcycle but not quite.

Did It Work?
Kind of, but it really wasn't a great idea to begin with even if it was a semiprelude to analog control in a racing game.

NAMCO JOGCON

How Does It Work?
The circle in the middle of the controller doubled as a steering wheel.

Did It Work?
Much like the Negcon, the idea was somewhat novel, but the execution proved to be less than ideal since it was primarily designed for use in the *Ridge Racer* games.



SEGA DREAMCAST FISHING ROD

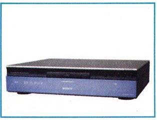
How Does It Work?
Pretty much what it says on the box—it was the perfect peripheral for fishing games.

Did It Work?
For fishing games, absolutely, but there are stories of people using the fishing rod to play other sorts of games with moderate success.

DEAL OR NO DEAL

I'LL BUY THAT FOR $600

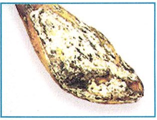
You think the PS3 is expensive? Check out these other items that are supposedly worth more than $600—this stuff'll both shock and surprise you, unless you're rich—in which case, you can just turn the page, Mr. or Ms. Moneybags.



SONY BLU-RAY PLAYER

PRICE: $999

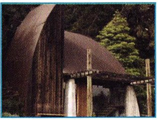
Deal Or No Deal: A Blu-ray player only does what it says: It plays Blu-ray movies. So for less than the price of Sony's own player, you could get a PlayStation 3 that plays Blu-ray movies *and* games. And it can connect to the Internet and do other fun stuff. No deal.



SPANISH HAM

PRICE: $750

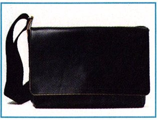
Deal Or No Deal: Look, a ham! Unfortunately, meat products such as this are only capable of one thing—maybe two. You can either eat this ham or hang it in a window for all to see. So, would you rather have something that's going to attract wild beasts instead of the sleek and sexy PlayStation 3, which is only known to primarily attract males in the 18-to-35 age range? No deal.



POST RANCH INN

PRICE FOR BUTTERFLY HOUSE: $550-695/NIGHT

Deal Or No Deal: And this is considered the "cheap" accommodation at the Post Ranch Inn, located in Big Sur, CA. We admit that having a view of the Pacific Ocean when you wake up in the morning is pretty cool, but for one night? Screw that. We'll take the PS3 and a copy of *Afrika* so that we can wake up to a polygonal Serengeti every day. Woo! Look at those hippos go! No deal.



JACK SPADE MESSENGER BAG AND WALLET

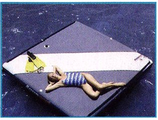
PRICE: $495 AND $65 RESPECTIVELY

Deal Or No Deal: Seriously, if you buy either of these, you need to be punched in the face—repeatedly. Why in sweet Odin's name would you pay this much for a wallet or a man purse when you could spend that money on something that's actually useful and won't make you look like a complete jerk? No deal.

IONIC BREEZE PURIFIER

PRICE: $549

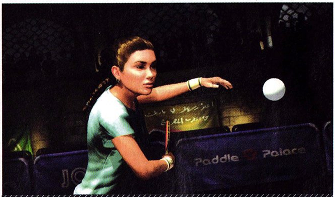
Deal Or No Deal: Hey, you want clean air? Go outside! Sure, maybe you'll wake up, walk into a room and say, "Wow, now that's some clean air. I can really tell that my house is now devoid of airborne germs—filthy, filthy germs." You'd rather say, "Wow, *Metal Gear Solid 4* looks amazing!" wouldn't you? Plus, the cooling fan on the PS3 will probably be big enough to clean the air in your house anyway. No deal.



CONVERTIBLE SPORTS BOAT AND INFLATABLE ISLAND

PRICE: $395 AND $319

Deal Or No Deal: OK, these are two things we're willing to make an exception for if it came down to buying them or a PS3. Nothing would make you feel like some kind of supervillain-in-training quite like a weird transforming-boat thingy or your own inflatable island that you could put out in the middle of the river. The only thing missing would be some kind of diabolical supercomputer—hmmmm.... Deal!

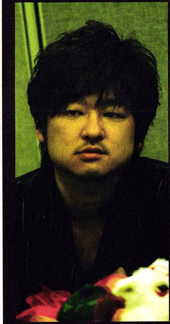


PLAYSTATION BITS

BYTE-SIZED NEWS

Another month, another round of amazing PlayStation news. It appears that Sony plans to push the PlayStation 3 as a computer more than we originally thought. Sony Computer Entertainment president **Ken Kutaragi** said this to the Japanese press: "We never said we would release a game console...it's clearly a computer." Hmm...that's not what **Sony CEA president Kaz Hirai** has said about the system; he's been adamant about promoting the PS3 as a game console.... Elsewhere, Kutaragi stated that **microtransactions** would be a key part of the PlayStation 3 and Sony's future, since the company won't be charging for online play.... In *Tomb Raid*-ing news, there's still a remake of the original game in the works for the PS2 and the PSP, but—like *Tomb Raider: Legend*—**Crystal Dynamics will be handling it** instead of original developer Core Design.... In awesome movie news, apparently someone wants to make a third ***House of the Dead* movie** since the first two were just so great.... And finally, word out on the street is that the engine powering **Rockstar's *Table Tennis*** game will serve as the foundation for the next ***Grand Theft Auto* game**—so anything that's bouncy in *GTA4* is probably gonna look pretty realistic, but it remains to be seen if this new engine can handle the franchise's massive cities.

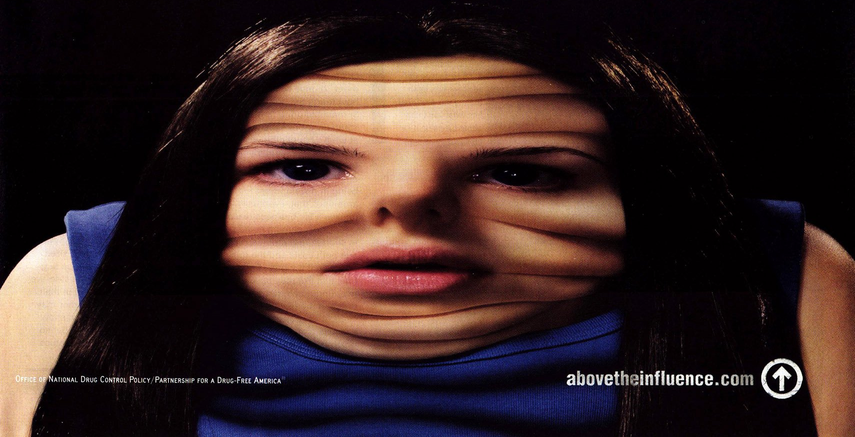
OVERHEARD



> "The Japanese development environment has become one where original titles are very hard to sell. It's not simply that they've lost the ability to create worlds. They've become companies interested in dealing with known quantities—going with established series that they know will sell as opposed to trying to risk it."

—Clover Studios' Atsushi Inaba on the abundance of sequels and lack of original games in Japan.

ALL THAT PRESSURE—
THE PRESSURE TO FIT IN, LOOK PERFECT, GET HIGH,
TO BE ACCEPTED—IF YOU LET IT PUSH ON YOU TOO
MUCH, HOW WILL YOU CHANGE?



Office of National Drug Control Policy/Partnership for a Drug-Free America®

abovetheinfluence.com

THE BIG PICTURE

BY JOHN DAVISON

JOHN DAVISON is master of the Ziff Davis domain and is quite knowledgeable about videogames. Maybe that has something to do with the 16 years he's been around this stuff. Tell him what you think about his column at opm@ziffdavis.com.

HOW EPISODIC GAMES WILL CHANGE THE PLAYSTATION EXPERIENCE

The new *Grand Theft Auto*, we're led to believe, will probably be a $60 game that will consequently be supplemented by downloadable episodes that you'll have to pay for. The new *Alone in the Dark* will be carved up into episodes and distributed monthly (or whatever timing integer they eventually settle on), rather than all at once. *Half-Life 2* on the PC is already being dished out in three-hour chunks, as is the *SiN Episodes* series. Like it or not, episodic gaming is already here, and it's going to become a big part of the way we pay for—and play—games on the PS3.

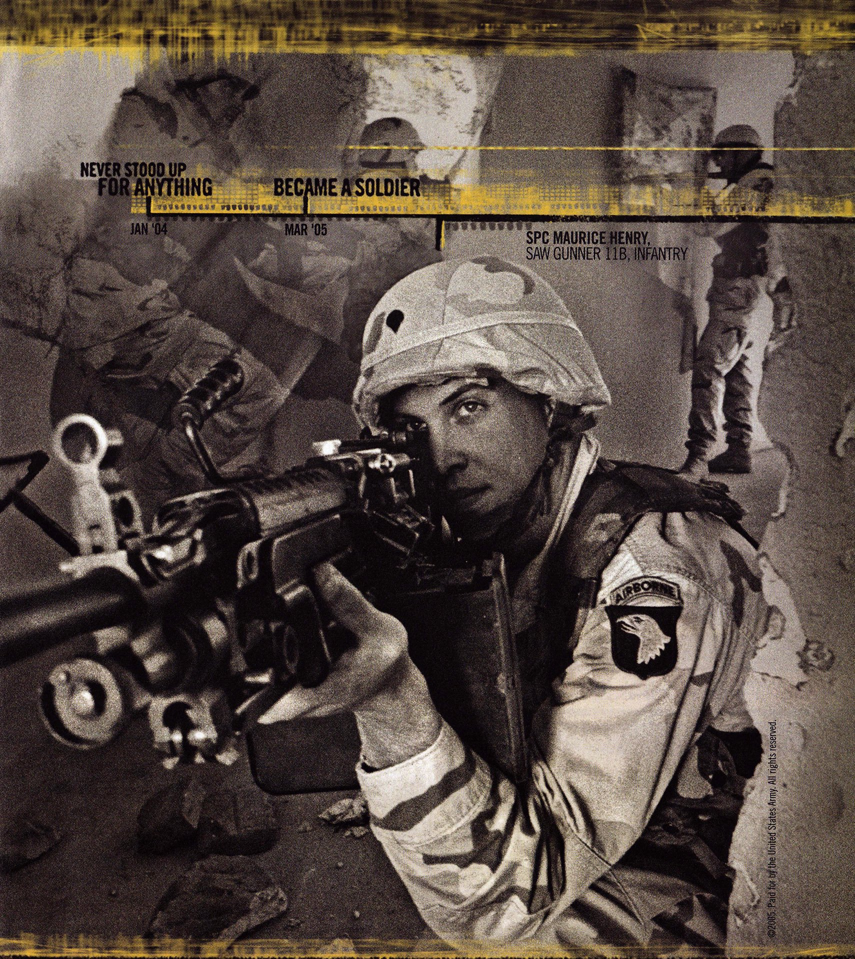
For the more cynical, there's the debate as to whether or not this is just a whole new way for publishers to try to screw more money out of us without putting in any extra effort. Why charge $60 for a game on a disc when you can carve it up into five chunks and charge $20 for each of them? Or there's the more positive argument, one championed by Valve founder and managing director Gabe Newell: "Episodic development gives us the opportunity to be much more responsive to community feedback and industry trends. We can adjust our content to deliver maximum entertainment value with each installment."

Both extremes are perfectly valid, and they'll be touch points, no doubt, for discussion throughout this generation. More importantly, though, we have to consider that episodic gaming may well be the *only* way that many game developers can survive, and it may be the one thing that saves us from cookie-cutter, risk-free, license-based "blockbuster" games.

> WHY CHARGE $60 FOR A GAME ON A DISC WHEN YOU CAN CARVE IT UP INTO FIVE CHUNKS?

Why? Ultimately, it all comes down to cost. Reports vary as to the specifics, but we're frequently informed that PS3 games—apples-to-apples with similar experiences on the PS2—are likely to cost "around $20 million" to put together. With that kind of investment, it's safe to assume that 1) the guys putting up the dough want a sure thing (franchises, licensed properties) and a guaranteed return on their investment, 2) once development starts, the clock is ticking and, regardless of how tough the project is, the games will *have* to come in on time, and 3) manufacturing large numbers of Blu-ray discs is going to be *substantially* more expensive (and risky) than churning out DVDs. Just look at what's happening with Xbox 360 games already. *The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion* is regularly updated through Xbox Live; a recent patch massively overhauled the game, fixing bugs, framerate issues, and a number of problems brought up by its playing community. Despite being in development for four long years, *Oblivion* was so big and so ambitious that, eventually, Bethesda and 2K Games absolutely *had* to release it for business reasons and deal with the consequences later.

Episodic gaming could potentially fix this. By releasing experiences in shorter, less ambitious chunks, developers and publishers can manage both costs and the quality of the experience in easier, bite-sized portions. If it works, the games we download like this should be bug-free, just like they used to be in the good old days. On the flip side, we may find that experiences we fall in love with may get cut off in their prime. If the first few "episodes" aren't doing well, the publisher may "cancel" a project, much like a TV network will cancel a failing show because of poor ratings. Regardless, this next generation is about so much more than just changing your expectations about HD graphics.


NEVER STOOD UP
FOR ANYTHING
JAN '04
BECAME A SOLDIER
MAR '05
SPC MAURICE HENRY,
SAW GUNNER 11B, INFANTRY
AIRBORNE

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Army training breeds selflessness. For Specialist Henry, that lesson didn't take long to learn. His team only consists of five men. They do everything together, as one. Being a part of that team has given him more strength than he's ever known. But more importantly, it's given him something to fight for. **Find your strength at goarmy.com**

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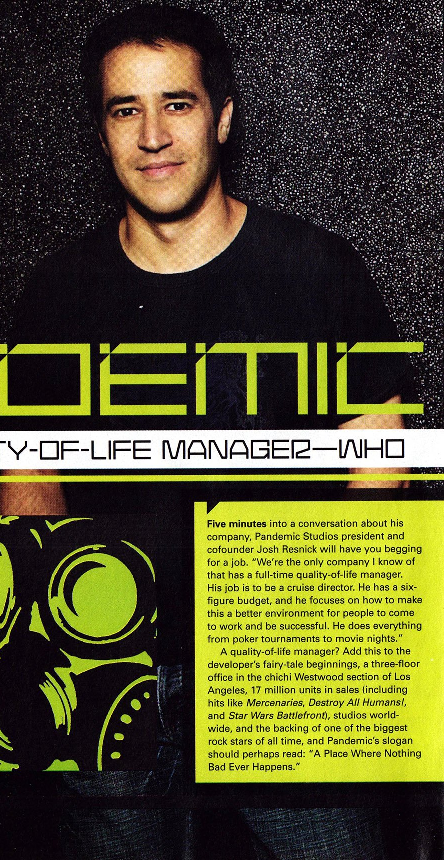


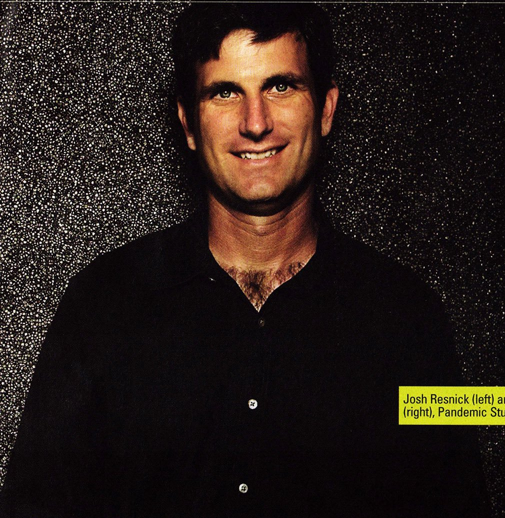
PANDEMIC

THEY HAVE A QUALITY-OF-LIFE MANAGER—WHO

photos by JASON ODELL

Five minutes into a conversation about his company, Pandemic Studios president and cofounder Josh Resnick will have you begging for a job. "We're the only company I know of that has a full-time quality-of-life manager. His job is to be a cruise director. He has a six-figure budget, and he focuses on how to make this a better environment for people to come to work and be successful. He does everything from poker tournaments to movie nights."

A quality-of-life manager? Add this to the developer's fairy-tale beginnings, a three-floor office in the chichi Westwood section of Los Angeles, 17 million units in sales (including hits like *Mercenaries*, *Destroy All Humans!*, and *Star Wars Battlefront*), studios worldwide, and the backing of one of the biggest rock stars of all time, and Pandemic's slogan should perhaps read: "A Place Where Nothing Bad Ever Happens."



Josh Resnick (left) and Andrew Goldman (right), Pandemic Studios cofounders

RÉSUMÉ

Battlezone II: Combat Commander
(Activision, 1999)

Dark Reign 2
(Activision, 2000)

Triple Play Baseball 2002
(EA Sports, 2002)

Army Men: RTS
(3DO, 2002)

Star Wars: The Clone Wars
(LucasArts, 2002)

Full Spectrum Warrior
(THQ, 2004)

Star Wars Battlefront
(LucasArts, 2004)

Star Wars Battlefront II
(LucasArts, 2005)

Mercenaries: Playground of Destruction
(LucasArts, 2005)

Destroy All Humans!
(THQ, 2005)

Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers
(THQ, 2006)

UNMASKED

SAYS INDEPENDENT DEVELOPERS CAN'T THRIVE?

BEAUTIFUL DAY

Accusations from Venezuela's "*el presidente*" Hugo Chavez that *Mercenaries II* is CIA propaganda aside, Resnick, a 39-year-old MBA from Malibu, CA who cofounded Pandemic in 1998 with CEO (and two-time Olympic sailor) Andrew Goldman (also 39), is quick to note the company's history hasn't all been rainbows and lollipops. "We've had product failures, and we've had products cancelled where, for a variety of reasons, we weren't able to bring the concept together or the timing or the resources, but we're very careful that we step up and take responsibility when that happens and try to learn from that. And hope it doesn't happen again, because it's a really painful experience to go through."

But Pandemic's rise is more fittingly summed up by Goldman: "It's a series of fortunate events."

In the mid-'90s, Resnick and Goldman were full-time employees at Activision as directors on *Dark Reign* and *Battlezone*, respectively. "The impetus for breaking away from Activision came from Andrew, who wanted to set up an independent developer with a more, arguably, creative culture than what we could have at the time," explains the animated Resnick. "He wanted to set up a very focused, developer-centric culture. I was tasked with negotiating the deal."

Activision went for it. "They actually gave us a wonderful start as an independent developer," says Resnick. "Day one, we had funding for the company and our projects; we had two titles that we were working on, [*Battlezone II* and *Dark Reign 2*]. We were able to take key people out of the organization, [as well as] equipment and technology. With Activision's support, we were able to start running on day one, which was really nice."

"Nice"? In a time when most independent developers struggle for survival, a better word for this deal might be "extraordinary."

> "ANDREW WANTED TO SET UP A VERY FOCUSED, DEVELOPER-CENTRIC CULTURE."

"Activision saw it as a way to mitigate some of their own risk financially," says Resnick, "and they felt and believed in our thesis that we could make better games—and we could do it more affordably—if we were outside of the organization."

WITH OR WITHOUT YOU

After Activision's unusual strategic foresight gave birth to Pandemic, and a subsequent string of hits, Resnick and Goldman eventually developed a business model that allows them to take a game almost to com-

TIME TO PANDEMIC

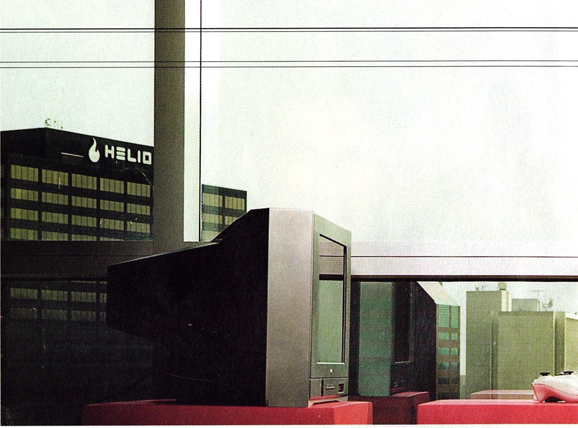
Resnick explains the origin of the company name: "It sounded cool. It was just a cool-sounding name. And there's some meaning to it, too, obviously—'pandemic' means 'the worldwide spread of something.' And we're hoping that our games become infectious." *OPM* takes a look at a few of the great pandemics of world history (with special thanks to Wikipedia.org):

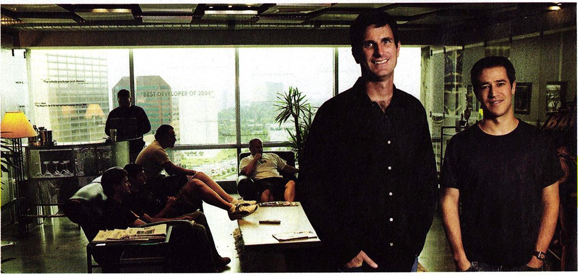
THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR, 431 BC
Typhoid fever kills a quarter of Athenian troops and a quarter of the population of Greece over the next four years, fatally weakening Athenian dominance in the region.

THE ANTONINE PLAGUE, 165-180 AD
Possibly smallpox brought to Europe from the Near East; kills up to 5 million people. At its height, 5,000 people a day reportedly succumb to the disease.

THE PLAGUE OF JUSTINIAN, BEGINNING 541 AD
This is the first known outbreak of bubonic plague. It starts in Egypt and makes its way to Constantinople, killing 10,000 people a day at its worst. It goes on to destroy a quarter of the population in the eastern Mediterranean.

THE BLACK DEATH, BEGINNING IN THE 1300S
The first wave of the mother of all pandemics reaches Europe in 1348 and wipes out 20 million people in six years.





pletion without a publishing deal in place. Currently, Pandemic (including a major studio branch of Pandemic in Australia headed by Greg Borrud) is keeping their 260 employees busy with six projects, only two of which have been announced (*Destroy All Humans! 2* and *Mercenaries II*), and one of which has no publisher yet (*Mercenaries II*).

Not that they haven't had help along the way. Elevation Partners, the venture-capital group lead in part by legendary U2 front man Bono, is a major investor. Last year, Elevation brought Pandemic and BioWare together in a sort of "sister-company" deal. Resnick clears any confusion: "It was not a merger. [BioWare] maintains their independence; they maintain their brands, their facilities, their products. Pandemic has no real interest in going into the RPG market, and BioWare has no real interest in going into the action market, but we both have respected each other from afar for many years. John Riccitiello, [the managing director of] Elevation said, 'Hey, I think you guys can be stronger working together.' It just made sense."

And has Bono found what he's looking for in Pandemic? Turns out, he's more involved than you might think. "I walked into Andrew's office a couple of weeks ago, and he was like, 'One second, it's Bono!' He was on the phone with Bono!" Resnick says with considerable glee.

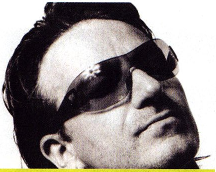
"Bono came to our offices during E3. It was almost like an episode of *The Apprentice*. Every product team would come in, they'd show him their product, and then get feedback. Nobody got fired, but it did feel like we were in the middle of a reality show," adds Goldman.

Wait, no rock-star pretensions? "Bono's one of the nicest, most approachable guys ever," says Resnick. "He just wants to learn, he's a big game player, and he really loves what we do. He sees it as a craft like film or music. He's not making our games."

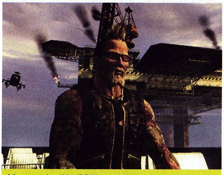
> "BONO REALLY LOVES WHAT WE DO. HE SEES IT AS A CRAFT LIKE FILM OR MUSIC."

E3, BLOODY E3

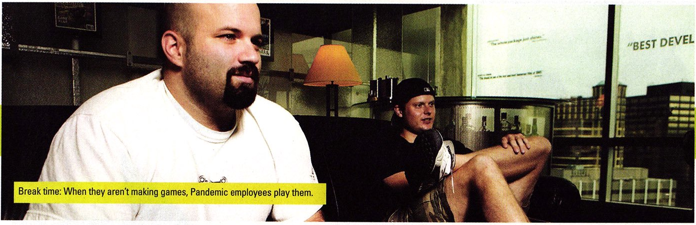
If anything that can undermine Pandemic's happy world, it's the danger of the "broken economics" getting in the way of innovation, particularly with the next generation. "Right now, our average team size is in the seventies or eighties, not including external groups we work with, mostly on the art side. When you add them in, it gets [to be] a little over 100 people on a project," says Resnick. "[With next-gen games],



U2's Bono is one of Pandemic's major backers.



Mercenaries II for PS3 is one of six current projects.



Break time: When they aren't making games, Pandemic employees play them.

we don't have a large enough install base, and the cost of making these games is absolutely insane. The economics are broken right now."

"And if you look at launching product, and you go all the way back to cartridge games, you were going to have maybe $500,000 or $1 million in development, $5 or $6 million in TV advertising, and then a bunch of money sunk into inventory." Goldman adds. "All the money and risk was on the marketing and the inventory. Now, you look at where the dollars are being spent, and development costs are a much higher percentage of bringing a product to market,"

Resnick suggests further shifts in the economics of gaming that may tilt the balance in favor of the developers: "BioWare is experimenting with electronic software distribution, and some other companies are experimenting with that as well."

But wouldn't this hurt traditional retailers? "Come on—half of the store is dedicated to used games now, and we make nothing from that!" says Resnick. "Where's the room for my products on the shelves? Look, I respect retail's role in this whole chain here, but we need to have a direct relationship with our consumers. And I think it'll be good for the industry overall if we do that. Publishers, developers, everyone. And retailers will be able to get into that market as well—everyone will have a piece of that, but it's good for everyone if we develop other distribution methods."

Creative innovation is a cornerstone to the Pandemic argument. "The economics are broken if we don't make better, more broadly appealing games. How many products at E3 did you see that you really thought had mass-market appeal?" Goldman points out. "The industry needs innovation. Right now, the industry is starved for a product that's going to energize consumers. Nintendo is really the one place where you're seeing a real drive on the innovative software."

UNTIL THE END OF THE WORLD

Goldman never quite comes out and says it, but it's a sure bet Pandemic can count itself among the innovators. Summing up his company's approach to making games may reveal a bit of his own fantasy: "One of the recurring themes of our games is that they allow the player to become a legend. It's like, whatever the world is, if you're in the great battles of *Star Wars*, we want you to become a legendary figure in that environment. If you're a mercenary, become the greatest mercenary and capture the biggest bounties. In *Destroy All Humans!*, it's being the guy who [takes] over the world."

And maybe in the *Game Developer* action game, Pandemic's the company that takes over the world. Their quality-of-life manager should get on that right away. |

PANDEMIC LIKES...

Cofounders Andrew Goldman's and Josh Resnick's non-Pandemic objects of gaming admiration:

GRAND THEFT AUTO
"A seminal work in the history of gaming, because it really let people drop in there and find their own way. It didn't put a barrier in front of [you]." —Goldman

SAM HOUSER
(Rockstar Games)
"Obviously, with the support of his team, [Houser] did exactly what Andrew was talking about with the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise. He changed gaming." —Resnick

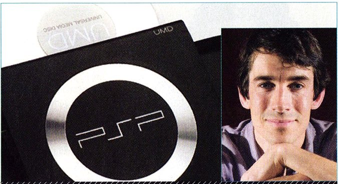
NINTENDO
"Their passion for innovation and doing new things and being experimental, whether it's *Nintendogs* or *Mario Kart DS*. They've done a great job with the connection with [both] the hardware and the software." —Goldman

UBISOFT
"They've really built an inspirational organization. They're turning out great products, but they've also built an organization that can take risks." —Goldman

GRIM FANDANGO
"What Tim Schafer has done, some of that just makes me feel so small creatively. It's amazing." —Goldman

PETER MOLYNEUX
"He's so good at packaging up compelling fantasies [e.g., *Black & White*, *The Movies*, *Fable*], and that's something that we're really focused on here." —Goldman

BLIZZARD
"There's not a single product that's come out of there that I don't love. And *World of WarCraft* has redefined a whole new area of gaming." —Resnick



WHAT'S IN YOUR PSP?

IT DOES MORE THAN PLAY GAMES

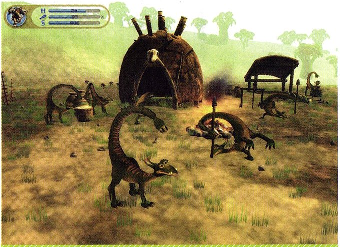
TED PRICE
President, Insomniac Games

GAMES
The demo for *LocoRoco*—this game is going to *RULE*!

MOVIES
Howl's Moving Castle

MUSIC
Mastodon (current favorite album: *Leviathan*)

WEB
Lately, I've been checking out www.highend3d.com and www.deathfall.com.



GAME ENVY

SPORE (PC)

Will Wright's already tackled city planning (*SimCity*) and sociology (*The Sims*); now he's gunning for evolution in next year's *Spore*, planned for release on the PC. You start as a single cell and eventually get to the point where you're colonizing solar systems throughout the galaxy—it's estimated that you'll be able to explore approximately 2 million planets. One of the craziest and coolest parts of the game is the various editors (creatures, plants, buildings, vehicles, planets) that allow for an infinite amount of creativity in your constructions.

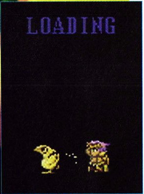
Though all gameplay will take place locally, your computer connects with a central *Spore* database. Anything created on any copy of *Spore* goes into that database and gets indexed appropriately; when your game determines you need new content (say, a new type of creature to populate a planet you're going to visit), it'll pull down a species from the database to fit within the environment—think of it as massively single-player. And think of us as massively excited for this game's release.

TRENDSPOTTER

CHOCOBOS

Oh, the chocobo. Is there a more beloved beast in all of gaming? Our fine feathered friend will be featured in a whole lot of upcoming games, including *Final Fantasy XII*, *Final Fantasy XIII*, and whatever other expansions come out for *Final Fantasy XI*, but we thought it'd be a great idea to also celebrate the fact that chocobos have appeared in several past releases, including a few in which they were the prime focus. There are too many games to list in totality here—but this is to all the chocobos out there, our primary mode of transportation in *Final Fantasy* games. Special note to Square Enix: Show the overweight storage shed of a chocobo a little more love, please?

CHOCOBO RACING



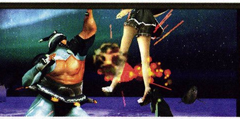
FINAL FANTASY IV

1243/1421 295
FINAL FANTASY VII

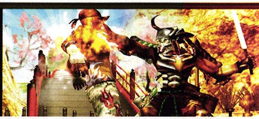
CHOCOBO'S DUNGEON

FINAL FANTASY X

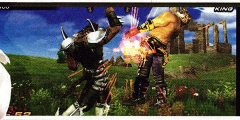
THE POWER OF THE GREATEST FIGHTING DYNASTY IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND.



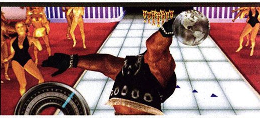
Share your customized character through wireless infrastructure Ghost mode.



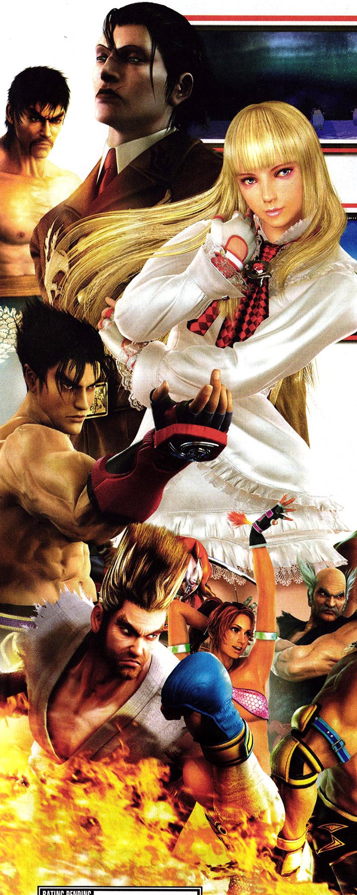
Wireless ad hoc battle with up to 2 players to prove who is the real champion.



Updated and enhanced graphics on 19 stages of pain.



Play mini-games in ad hoc mode or individually for a change in the action.



TEKKEN® DARK RESURRECTION

Tekken: Dark Resurrection has arrived on the PSP™ (PlayStation® Portable) system. Fight with new characters Lili and Dragunov or other favorites including Jin, Heihachi, and Armor King.

GAMESPOT EDITORS' CHOICE WINNER

"Best Fighting Game"
"Best PSP Game"

ign.com BEST OF E3 2006 WINNER

"Best PSP Fighting Game"

RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Visit www.esrb.org for updated rating information.

PSP™ PlayStation®Portable

BANDAI NAMCO™ Games

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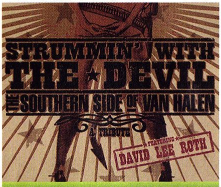
PAUSE WHEN YOU'RE NOT PLAYING GAMES

LISTEN

THE AROCKALYPSE
Lordi

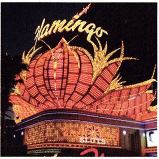
O sweet, merciful gods of rock, thou has blessed us with the arrival of Lordi. There was a time when rock was fun and full of awesomeness—before all this "woe is me" business that you see today. Thankfully, those crazy Finns have been secretly working on a way to revive rock and bring it back to what it's supposed to be—and the result is Lordi. Not only does the band wear totally awesome costumes while they're on stage, but they also have a variety of props—including ax guitars that shoot fire. As for the lyrics, here's a taste: "The Devil is a loser, and he's my b****." Rad.



STRUMMIN' WITH THE DEVIL
David Lee Roth

No. No. No. No! We're not telling you to go out and get this album. We're telling you to avoid it with every fiber of your being. It's not so much that the songs on here are bluegrass interpretations of popular Van Halen songs—because that part of it actually doesn't sound too bad. But what does sound bad is none other than Mr. Roth. His voice really isn't meant for this kind of music—so, with that in mind, we have a personal message for him: Dave, buddy, everybody knows that Van Halen was at its high point when you were the front man, doing your crazy high kicks—but dude, as your friend, we're telling you it's time to let go.

FEEL



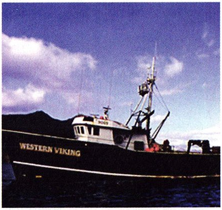
LAS VEGAS
The Mafia

We wanted to take a moment of your time to say that Las Vegas rocks. If you haven't had a chance to visit this desert fortress of lights, alcohol, and new-and-improved family fun, we recommend you do so, posthaste. Most of the casinos on the strip are incredibly cool, because they're like labyrinths of shiny objects and whimsical sounds. Plus, there are plenty of things to do inside of them, such as eat, drink, gamble, and sleep. Everyone loves sleep.

MACBOOK PRO
Apple

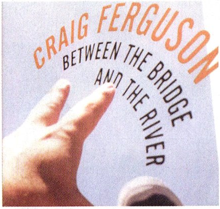
Finally, all of the Apple owners out there get a machine that no PC owner can make fun of for its lack of software support or games. Why? Because the sleek and sexy MacBook Pro, which features Intel processors, can run the latest versions of Windows through a nifty little product called Boot Camp. Want to play *Oblivion* or *Half-Life 2* on your shiny new Mac? Go right ahead and do it. The only problem is the price—but this machine is too sleek to pass up.

SEE



THE DEADLIEST CATCH
The Discovery Channel

What's better than a show about crabs? A show about crab fishing—that's what. To give you a better idea of what this Discovery Channel series is like, picture this: Imagine if everyone in a season of the *The Real World* had his or her own boat. Each of these boats has a quota to fill, and instead of squabbling about who used the peanut butter last, you get guys who are in a real life-and-death struggle on the Bering Sea off the coast of Alaska—an inhospitable place.



BETWEEN THE BRIDGE AND THE RIVER
Craig Ferguson

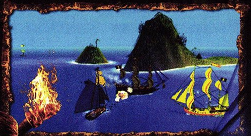
Normally, we wouldn't promote a book like this (or maybe we would—we're crazy like that), but this particular novel was written by none other than Craig Ferguson, the host of *The Late Late Show* on CBS. If you haven't watched it or don't really know who he is—well, you should be ashamed of yourself. But, trust us—he's a pretty hilarious guy, and his Sean Connery impression is spot-on. And it's only made funnier by the fact that Mr. Ferguson is Scottish himself.

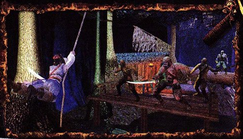
Disney
PIRATES of the CARIBBEAN
DEAD MAN'S CHEST

NEVER TRUST A PIRATE!

Play as the notorious Jack Sparrow and experience the adventure of a pirate's life as you battle the undead, vicious cannibals and monstrous creatures of the deep.

Fight the undead in a battle for your soul.


Clash in epic ship-to-ship battles via multiplayer.


Use special pirate combo moves and superior agility to defeat enemies.

Battle swarms of enemies in your quest for the Dead Man's Chest.

Play The Game. See The Movie.

piratesvideogame.com

TEEN
T
Violence
ESRB CONTENT RATING www.esrb.org

PSP
PlayStation.Portable

NINTENDO DS

GAME BOY ADVANCE

AMAZE

bvg
BUENA VISTA GAMES

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BRIGHT LIGHTS
One of the bad things about Akihabara is that game vendors tend to increase the prices of those hard-to-find games right around Tokyo Game Show time, since foreigners are usually willing to pay ridiculous prices for them. Note to foreigners: Stop being stupid and buying this stuff, and maybe retailers won't jack up their already high prices.

J-TOWN

WELCOME TO ELECTRIC AVENUE

The number of times I travel to Japan every year makes me wonder when I'm going to qualify for honorary citizenship. Every place in Japan gives you one of those frequent-buyer cards, like Tower Records. And every time you buy something, you get a stamp on your card, and when the card is filled up, you get a free CD or something. I hope that once my passport is full of stamps from Narita airport that they'll let me stay permanently. Tokyo to me is like a big ol' technological playground. Some folks don't like the fast-paced tempo of having thousands of people swarming around you at all times, but I do. It reminds me of New York City, where you can feel the energy of people going to and fro. The primary difference is that New York doesn't have nearly as many toys, and the city with the most toys wins.

Akihabara (aka Electric Town) is where most game-loving newcomers flock, since it's basically like a long-ass Times Square, filled with enough neon to power certain third-world nations, and electronics shops as far as the eye can see. The first time I went to Akihabara, it was like a dream come true. Any game I want, I can probably find there—even an ancient *Castlevania* cartridge for some old Japan-only system like the MSX. But once you've been to Akihabara—despite the sheer convenience of the place—it gets kind of monotonous to go there. When I go to Japan, I usually stay in Shinjuku or Shibuya, where I can find everything I want, whether it's games or clothes or music or movies. The reason the shine comes off of Akihabara so fast (despite the cool arcades and whatnot) is that there's only so many game shops you can go into before you realize you're just seeing the same crap over and over again. Imagine if you lived in a town with an EB Games, a GameStop, a Best Buy, a Circuit City, a Sears, a Blockbuster, and 12 other shops that all sold videogames stacked next to each other on the same street. Would *Tomb Raider: Legend* look any more appealing in the sixth shop you saw it in? Probably not. As they say, familiarity breeds contempt, and while it's hard to have any contempt for a store that can somehow manage to fill six floors (like Yamagiwa Soft) of precious Tokyo real estate with videogames, DVDs, CDs, anime, and toy robots, it does become somewhat routine after you've seen it for the 40th time.

> EVERY PLACE IN JAPAN GIVES YOU ONE OF THOSE FREQUENT-BUYER CARDS, LIKE TOWER RECORDS.

Still, as my passport fills—and while I wait for my honorary citizenship to arrive in the mail—I'll pass the time trying to figure out which cool new Japanese cell phone I want to replace my old one with. Having a permanent cell in Japan—instead of a rental—makes coordinating with my friends much less stressful. Because when I'm in Japan, I like to imagine that I live there, and that this day is like any other. I eat where the locals eat, and I ride the subway like everyone else (cabs will set you back a pretty penny), and while I'm there, I'm not usually found in Electric Town. | *James Mielke*

X kevin robinson
WOODWARD
WOODWARD
get Xtreme x get RIGHT GUARD XTREME
POWER STRIPE
Stronger Fragrance!
RIGHT GUARD
XTREME
FRESH BLAST
INVISIBLE SOLID
ANTI-PERSPIRANT DEODORANT
NET WT. 2.6 OZ. (73g)

Ted Price

independently minded

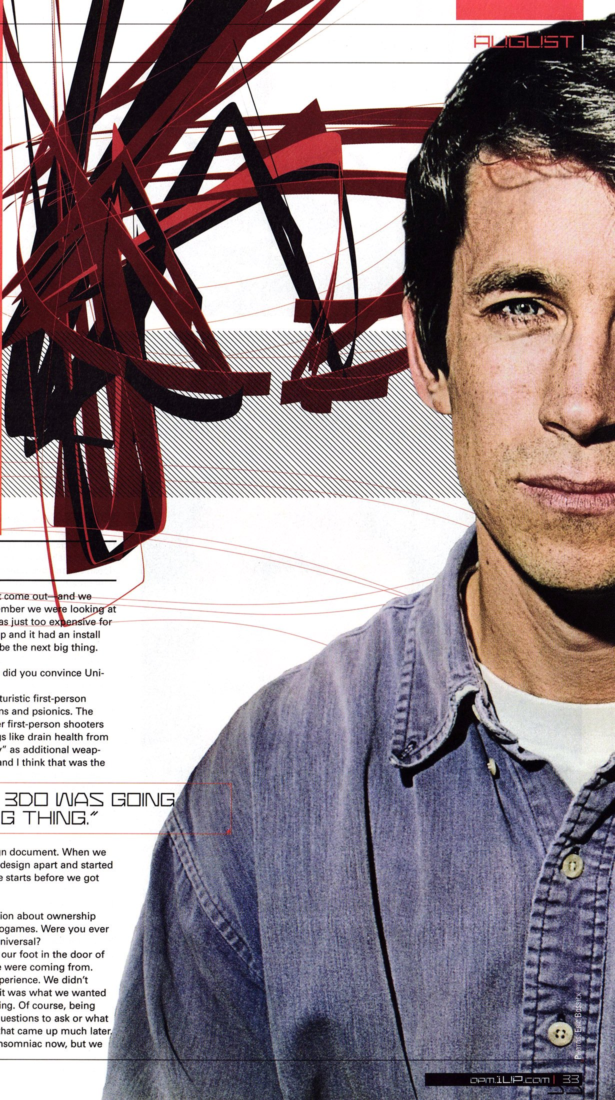
In an era where everyone is talking about consolidation, huge budgets, enormous team sizes, and the ever-growing business of videogames, Insomniac stands as a beacon to an time where development was fueled by creativity and not the almighty dollar. President Ted Price and the rest of the team have made sure that, despite the immense amount of success Insomniac has experienced over the years, it all hasn't gone to their heads. They've managed to maintain their independent, garage-studio sensibility, something that a few other companies could stand to learn from. We talked to Ted Price to find out how Insomniac got started, how it became such a success, and where it's headed.

| **OPM** How do you go from working at a startup medical company to videogames?
| **TED PRICE** I was helping out in various areas of the company, but as it continued to grow, I decided that medicine really wasn't my passion at all. I was hoping to get into a more creative industry. I've always loved games and had an opportunity to start something on my own.

| **OPM** What was the starting process for you?
| **TP** Actually, I started out in a pretty idiotic fashion, having no clue what it took to make a videogame. I assumed I could buy or lease a development station from 3DO, write a game design document, and somehow figure out how to make a game. I was as wrong as one could be. I was very fortunate that after a few months of banging my head against a wall, [I ran] into a guy named Alex Hastings. Alex was just about to graduate from Princeton, which is also my alma mater, and he agreed to come out and help create the demo for our first game—*Disruptor*. He and I worked together for about a month to put together a prototype for the game. It was very rough, but we made a video of it and started driving up and down the West Coast, cold-calling publishers to see if they had any interest in the game. Again, we did this without any knowledge of how one should sell a videogame to a publisher.

I think we got the door slammed in our faces just about every single time until we ran into a guy named Mark Cerny, who just started at Universal Interactive Studios. At this point, I had about $1,000 in my bank account. We were renting an office, we had bought some computer equipment, and Al was living on my couch, so it was truly a garage operation at that point. We knew if we didn't make a deal, it would've been a fun, but short-lived, adventure. Mark Cerny actually took a chance and signed us up to a three-game deal—which was interesting, because neither of us really had any experience designing games. I think they [offered the deal] based on the strength of Al's technology. He put together a rudimentary engine in a month that was pretty incredible. When Mark saw this, I think he was very impressed.

| **OPM** Any particular reason you chose the 3DO?
| **TP** At that point, the 3DO was the only CD-based console. The Play-


Photos: Eric Bossick

RÉSUMÉ

- Disruptor (1996, PS1)
- Spyro the Dragon (1998, PS1)
- Spyro 2: Ripto's Rage! (1999, PS1)
- Spyro: Year of the Dragon (2000, PS1)
- Ratchet & Clank (2002, PS2)
- Ratchet & Clank: Going Commando (2003, PS2)
- Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal (2004, PS2)
- Ratchet: Deadlocked (2005, PS2)
- Resistance: Fall of Man (2006, PS3)
- Ratchet & Clank (working title) (2007, PS3)

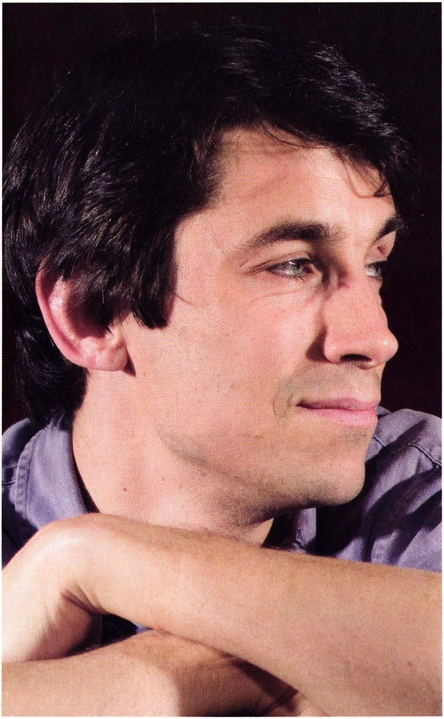
Station hadn't come out—or the specs had just come out—and we started up in the winter of 1993 and '94. I remember we were looking at a development kit for the PlayStation, and it was just too expensive for us. We went with the 3DO because it was cheap and it had an install base at that point. We thought it was going to be the next big thing.

| OPM What was the pitch for *Disruptor*? How did you convince Universal to take a chance?
| TP Let me see if I remember this: It was a futuristic first-person shooter where you had an inventory of weapons and psionics. The psionics were what made it different from other first-person shooters out there. They gave you the ability to do things like drain health from enemies and use a reservoir of "mental energy" as additional weapons. At the time, nobody else was doing that, and I think that was the only thing that survived through the final design document. When we signed up with Universal, we ripped the game design apart and started over again. In fact, we went through a few false starts before we got the game going in any real state.

> "WE THOUGHT THE 3DO WAS GOING TO BE THE NEXT BIG THING."

| OPM Back then, there wasn't a lot of discussion about ownership over intellectual property when it came to videogames. Were you ever conscious of that while making the deal with Universal?
| TP At that point, we were just looking to get our foot in the door of the industry. You have to understand where we were coming from. We were two guys who had absolutely zero experience. We didn't know how to make a game. We just knew that it was what we wanted to do and that we would do pretty much anything. Of course, being true garage developers, we didn't know what questions to ask or what mines to avoid. Certainly, that was something that came up much later. It's something that's much more important to Insomniac now, but we

Ted Price



wanted to get the deal done, get some money, hire some folks, and start developing the game.

| OPM Is there anything you take from that experience that you use to this day, not just in terms of game development, but also in dealing with publishers?
| TP Every deal Insomniac does with a publisher is a deal that has the benefit of previous experience. The more experience you have, the easier it is to strike fair deals. At that point, we struck deals for ourselves that weren't terribly fair when it came down to Insomniac's side. It was a tough learning experience, but we survived—and in just surviving, I think we were able to build the values that we still use at Insomniac to this day.

| OPM Is *Spyro* still a rough subject?
| TP Oh, not at all. When we walked away from *Spyro*, a lot of the team was done with that character. We really needed to move onto something else, and Spyro as a character has limitations—I mean, he doesn't even have hands! We couldn't do much besides come up with new breath attacks to make the character more interesting. It was, in some respects, a relief to the team to move on to a clean slate and do something that was less restrictive than *Spyro*.

| OPM Is that how Ratchet and Clank were born?
| TP Interestingly, we didn't start by doing *Ratchet* when we moved off of *Spyro*. Typically, at Insomniac, the process for coming up with a new franchise is a very collaborative one. We ask everyone for ideas. We brainstorm collectively on various things, and when we finished with Spyro, we knew wanted to branch out a little bit from the platforming genre. We had many meetings where we all got together—at that point, I think there were 15 of us—and threw ideas out and see what stuck out. What we ended up with was a more mature adventure idea—it was about a Mayan girl with a staff who would run around ancient environments and cast magic. So we went down that path for a while, but it simply didn't work.

At this point, we were working with Sony, and they said, "If you guys want to do this, that's great, but we think you're going to have trouble with this one." A lot of us debated what to do, and we ended up collectively decided that we were walking away from one of our real strengths, which is platforming. So we thought, "Let's go back to that and see what we can do to take the genre in a different direction." And that's how *Ratchet* was born.

Brian [Hastings], who is another partner of the company, joined us right after we got our deal with Universal. He had suggested doing a game that featured a little character that travels between planets and has cool weapons and gadgets. From that kernel of an idea, everybody started pouring in more of their own creativity. Ratchet and Clank both evolved from that idea, and it became a real passion of everyone at Insomniac to add stuff to the IP.

| OPM *Ratchet & Clank* became a huge hit, but were you ever peering over at Universal to see what they were doing with *Spyro*?
| TP It's hard for me to speak for everybody on the team. We were very small back then, and we still have some folks from that team here. But when we see new versions of *Spyro*, it doesn't necessarily feel like he's still ours. We have a fondness for *Spyro,* and sometimes it's pain-

> "We're making sure everyone in the company has a voice."

ful to see a *Spyro* game that doesn't live up to what we believe a *Spyro* game should be. But it's not within our control, and we've moved well beyond it, so we're not really stressed out about it.

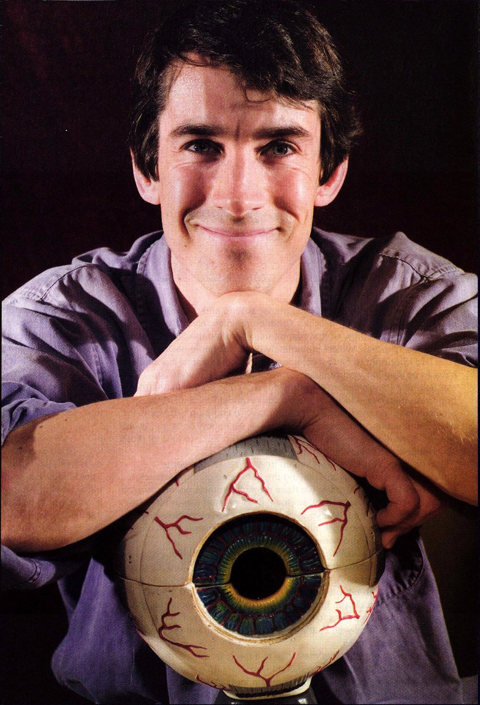
| **OPM** Do you think garage development isn't as viable today as it was when Insomniac got started?
| **TP** Not at all. I think the PSP, DS, and mobile phones offer excellent opportunities for small groups of people to get together and dive into the industry. It's a great opportunity for people that are young to get into the industry without incredibly high risks, which is what you run into with the larger console games. But I think that the opportunity has been growing over the past few years. I think you can look at PC games as well and see the mod community. It's a fantastic place for small groups of people to get together and earn names for themselves and perhaps strike a deal with a publisher.

| **OPM** That's what happened with *Counter-Strike*.
| **TP** Right. The opportunities are out there for people. They just have to look for them. The real challenge is hitting it big. It seems that these days, to hit it really big, you need a massively successful PC game, Xbox game, PlayStation 2 game, or 360 game. That's where the big hits are, but there always games that are coming out that prove everybody wrong.

| **OPM** But don't you think that with the increasing costs of development on console, the idea of starting a garage operation is too intimidating?
| **TP** Again, consoles have become pretty spread out in terms of what you can develop for. There are the handhelds, and they're cheaper to develop for than the Xbox 360 or the PlayStation 3. They are good gateways into developing for more complex and expensive consoles.

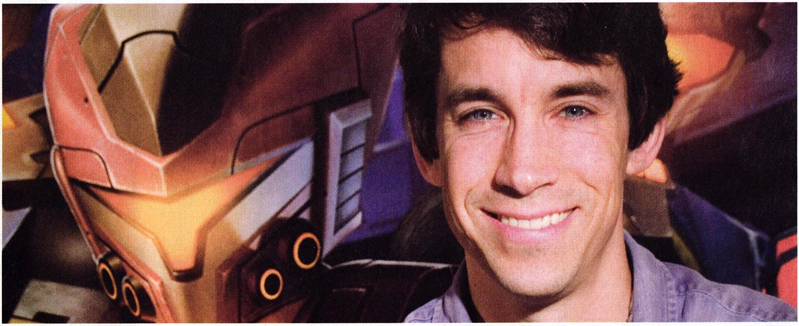
| **OPM** Do you think the big companies—Sony, Microsoft, Nintendo—need to do a better job of promoting that?
| **TP** Developers who are interested in making names for themselves will find those opportunities. I don't think console manufacturers have to hand it to them on a silver platter. There are a lot of people in this industry with an entrepreneurial bent, and they will take advantage of what's available and figure out what their limitations are. It was the same thing we did. We started by biting off more than we could chew, but then we scaled back.

| **OPM** Does Insomniac serve as a model for what an independent developer could do or should do?
| **TP** Well, in some ways, yes. I think one thing that we're proud of is that we are independent and that we've maintained our independence for so long. It's been 12 years now. Even more importantly, we've been able to maintain our culture throughout those 12 years. Despite the fact that we've grown quite a bit, we haven't changed our culture much at all. In fact, one of the things that has been a nice validation of that is that, for the second year in a row, we've been included in [the Great Place to Work Institute's annual list of] the top five best small companies to work for in America. Especially in what we consider a fairly challenging time, where we're developing a brand-new product on a brand-new console, the culture has remained similar. We're continuing to push collaboration and efficiency. We're listening to everyone here and making sure that everyone in the company has a voice in the way the company is run and the way we make our games.



Ted Price

"We have to keep the dials up in terms of innovation for games."



| OPM You mentioned that people gather around and throw ideas at each other for the design process. Other companies rely heavily on focus testing and things of that nature, usually called the "design-by-committee" process. Which is ultimately better for game design?

| TP It's important to have a collaborative design process. It doesn't have to be design-by-committee, but we don't believe the design can be one person's vision. Games are too big, too complex, and too important these days to have one person responsible for all of the creativity. We ask everybody in the company to come up with ideas for whatever it is they're interested in—whether it's enemy behavior, weapons, or story. It's the design department's responsibility to take all those suggestions and basically formulate a game.

We do have a lot of reviews within Insomniac where people throughout the company are playing the game and giving feedback. Every Tuesday and Thursday, we have multiplayer tests where we grab 32 people across the company, sit down at lunch, and play multiplayer [*Resistance*] for an hour. We've also done a few surveys where people come to designers with their suggestions or complaints, and the designers attack the problems.

We have a pretty vociferous community of folks who have very strong opinions of what should be going on in the game, and it's great feedback for designers. And of course, we do have our design meetings where we grab people from all over the company and go over features. That's important, because if a designer has a crazy idea, then the game programmer has to say if it will or won't work. The artists have to have a say as well so that what the designers are suggesting isn't impossible to build.

What comes out of those meetings is a really good energy where everyone is participating in the design—you end up getting ideas that have been fire-tested [and are] generally a lot better than the original suggestion. And we make fewer mistakes that way when it comes to implementation.

| OPM Is the consumer reaction to games going to change now that consoles and games are getting so expensive?

| TP Even if the price didn't change, consumers would expect more, and we've seen that happen in each generation. Whether we're developing on [the] PS1 or PS2, in every game we've released, people have said they want to see something new. The price doesn't matter, because the consumer is never satisfied. That means we have to keep the dials up over here in terms of innovation and features for the games.

| OPM What does innovation mean to you?

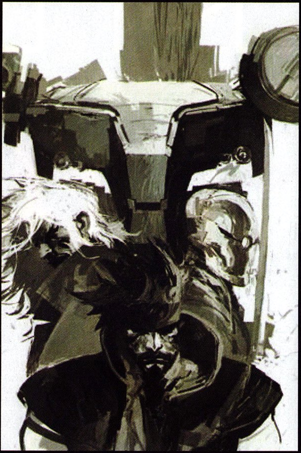
| TP Good question. Innovation to us means doing your best to introduce fresh new ideas but, at the same time, creating a twist on established ideas. For example, in *Resistance: Fall of Man*, we have a pretty big arsenal of weapons; so do most first-person shooters. Innovation is what we do with them and how we create weapon strategy—coming up with weapon behavior that people haven't experienced before in a first-person shooter. So it's very difficult to create a new genre or to innovate to the point where people say, "This game revolutionized the genre." On the other hand, it's much more reasonable and doable to innovate in many areas with a game so that experience feels different while remaining in the genre.

We did that with *Ratchet*. It was a twist on the platforming genre. We didn't set out to revolutionize it; we set out to take it in a new direction. We felt like we did our job in revitalizing the genre.

| OPM Since we're seeing powerful machines coming down the pipe, what do you think is going to happen to the industry?

| TP I think it's going to begin taking advantage of other methods of delivery—such as episodic content and microtransactions—to change games. We're already seeing limited episodic content, but I think it's going to become a very big thing over the next five or six years. |

SNAKE IS LOOKING FOR A LITTLE BACKUP



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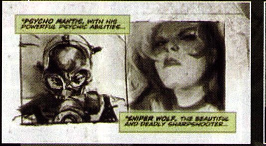
LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LIFE AND TIMES OF SOLID SNAKE IN THE NEW MGS DIGITAL GRAPHIC NOVEL


"PSYCHO MANTIS, WITH HIS POWERFUL PSYCHIC ABILITIES...
"SNIPER WOLF, THE BEAUTIFUL AND DEADLY SHARPSHOOTER...

I'M LIKE YOU. I HAVE NO NAME.

I'M IN FRONT OF THE DISPOSAL FACILITY.
NAOMI HERE. SNAKE, HOW'S THE SUIT WORKING OUT?

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KONAMI

AUGUST 06

THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION

SUNDAY

13

The **SNES** turns 15, making it older than approximately 50 percent of the *OPM* readership.

20

The Japanese network NHK (for which **Domo-kun** is the mascot) is founded in 1926. Kittens everywhere go into hiding.

MONDAY

07

If your qualification for attending this week's **Sturgis Motorcycle Rally** is that you played *Tourist Trophy*, you're probably going to get the s*** kicked out of you.

Creamsicle
Orange & Raspberry
12 PACK

14

I scream, you scream, we all scream for **National Creamsicle Day**!

21

So dark the con of man, indeed: In 1911, the **Mona Lisa** is stolen by a janitor and isn't recovered for two years.

TUESDAY

NEW GAMES

01

We're pretty sure that your girlfriend would want to get ***Crisis Core*** as her gift for **Girlfriend's Day**, no matter how much she says otherwise.

08

PlayStation Big Daddy (aka **Ken Kutaragi**) turns 56, which must be why no new games are coming out today.

22

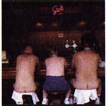
Are you ready for some football? It doesn't matter, because ***Madden NFL 07*** is coming out anyway.

29

Make your PSP more street by buying it ***50 Cent: Bulletproof*** and ***The Fast and the Furious***.

NEW GAMES

WEDNESDAY



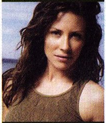
09

In honor of **National Underwear Day**, you should, you know, wear some.

23

They couldn't take his freedom, so instead they just took **William Wallace**'s beating heart out of his body back in 1305.

THURSDAY

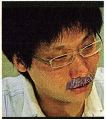


03

Giancarlo might think *Lost* sucks, but the rest of us think birthday girl **Evangeline Lilly** is plenty of reason to give it eternal love.

17

Here in the U.S. of A., it's **Back to School Month**. For every other country in the world, it's the **month to go on holiday**. Time to get a passport!



24

Hideo Kojima is 43. Maybe since he and Snake are both getting older, they can have matching mustaches!

FRIDAY

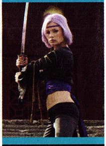
NEW FLICKS

04

Will ***Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby*** redeem Will Ferrell? Probably not, but at least Sacha Baron Cohen (aka Ali G) will be there to make us laugh.

18

It's an official *OPM* holiday: ***Snakes on a Plane*** arrives in theaters!

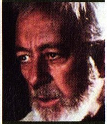


25

Thanks for the mammaries! The ***Dead or Alive*** movie comes out today.

NEW FLICKS

SATURDAY

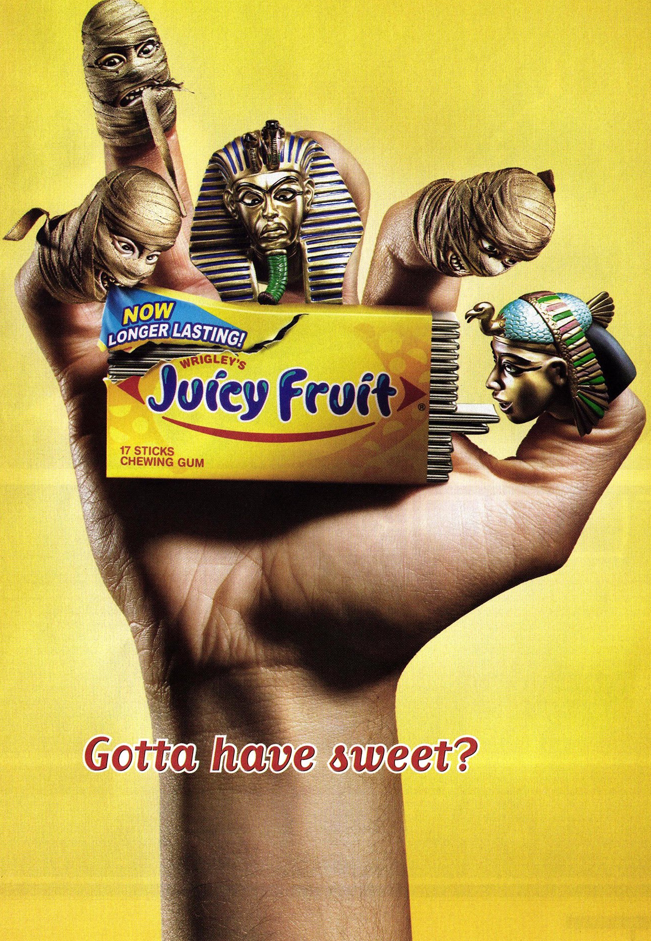


05

Obi-Wan Kenobi was our only hope, but then he went and died six years ago. Now we're screwed.

26

It's **National Dog Day**. It's also **National Children's Day**. You know what that means? Cage match!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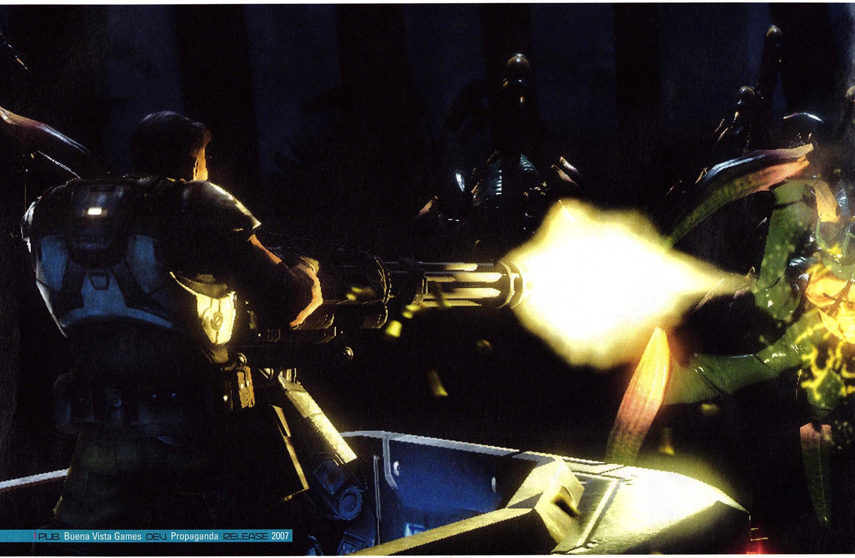


PUB. Buena Vista Games DEV. Propaganda RELEASE 2007

TUROK

WELCOME TO NOT-JURASSIC-PARK

What kind of game do you get when you throw in Mickey Mouse's business folks, a development team with titles like *Def Jam Vendetta* and *SSX* on their résumé, and an IP with roots firmly planted in both a comic book and a company that went bankrupt two years ago? Apparently, you get *Turok*.

The new *Turok* isn't a continuation of past *Turok* games, so no need to worry about villain Tobias Bruckner somehow surviving the end of *Turok: Evolution* and showing up in this new installment. Instead this is one of those trendy reinventions. Josh Holmes, VP and studio general manager at Propaganda, explains *Turok*'s genesis: "The core team was initially working on an original third-person action concept for Buena Vista when we heard that they were in the process of acquiring the *Turok* license. All of us were big fans of the original [N64] game, and we found ourselves continually coming up with ideas about how to reinvent the *Turok* franchise. We were inspired by the idea of creating a completely new *Turok* that captured the spirit of what made the original game so great. Eventually, we pitched BVG with a new *Turok* concept, and they accepted. As a result, we delayed the original project and switched over to *Turok*. In our research phase for this game, we played through the previous *Turok* games again and read through the original *Son of Stone* comic book series."

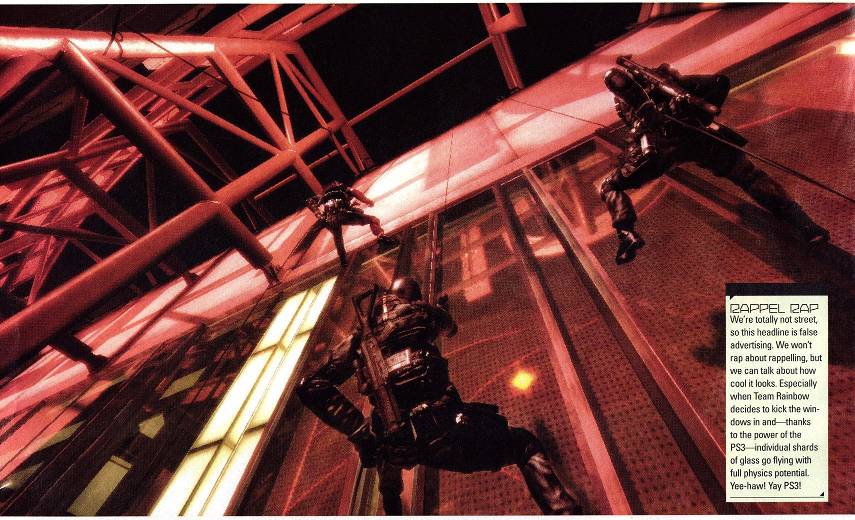
So no more dinosaur hunting in the Lost Land or fighting dinosaurs with guns attached to their heads. Instead, you're Joseph Turok, who's chasing some bad dude named Roland Cain to a planet filled with, as expected, dinosaurs. As previously mentioned, since this is a reinvention, that means no more weird enemies—your main foes are humans (the ragtag group of cronies and soldiers on Cain's side) and the dinosaurs native to the planet. During a demo session, not only did we see raptors jump out of the bushes to tear apart enemy soldiers, but we also saw a massive T-Rex chew its way through both the raptors and the soldiers.

Holmes elaborates on the use of, well, "regular" *Jurassic Park*–style dinosaurs as opposed to ones with rocket launchers on their tails or steel plates on their heads: "Our goal with this game has been to create a highly credible universe with a gritty, realistic feel. For the creatures in the game, we wanted to create terrifying beasts that put the fear of god into the player. We felt this could best be achieved by presenting realistic predatory animals rather than outlandish enemy designs. At the same time, gamers can be sure to expect a variety of original creatures, each posing a unique challenge to the player."

Arsenalwise, we've only seen the bow and arrow and the good ol' machine gun, which demonstrates the two approaches in the game: stealth and action. As expected, action is often faster and dirtier, while stealth requires a bit of patience and finesse; yet even just watching the game, you find more satisfaction in a face-stab or a silent arrow-impalement than in a hail of bullets.

BUG PIT!
Well, apparently, pits full of nasty arachnids are the new "in" thing for prehistoric-life-filled locales. Remember in *King Kong* when Jack Black and his gang fell into a big pit of bugs? Same deal here, looks like. Oh, and while there wasn't a bug pit in the 1933 *King Kong*, there was one in the original script.

TUROK



RAPPEL RAP
We're totally not street, so this headline is false advertising. We won't rap about rappelling, but we can talk about how cool it looks. Especially when Team Rainbow decides to kick the windows in and—thanks to the power of the PS3—individual shards of glass go flying with full physics potential. Yee-haw! Yay PS3!

Pub. Ubisoft **Dev.** Ubisoft Montreal **Release** Q4 2006

RAINBOW SIX: VEGAS

JUST THE DEVIL WITH BULLETS TO SPARE

You often hear about people getting "killed" in casinos. It's usually metaphorical, a dramatic way of conveying the feeling of being roughed up by a losing session of gambling.

Not this time. *Rainbow Six: Vegas* will insert an all-new Rainbow team into the glittering casinos and seedy backstreets of Sin City, and the inhabitants of this virtual Vegas—not to mention the city itself—will not survive unscathed. The premise: Terrorists have targeted this near-future, fictionalized Vegas as a platform from which to gain the attention of the world. They've taken hostages, they've planted explosives, and they've captured the eye of the media. Team Rainbow is sent in to politely ask them to leave. You can guess the rest.

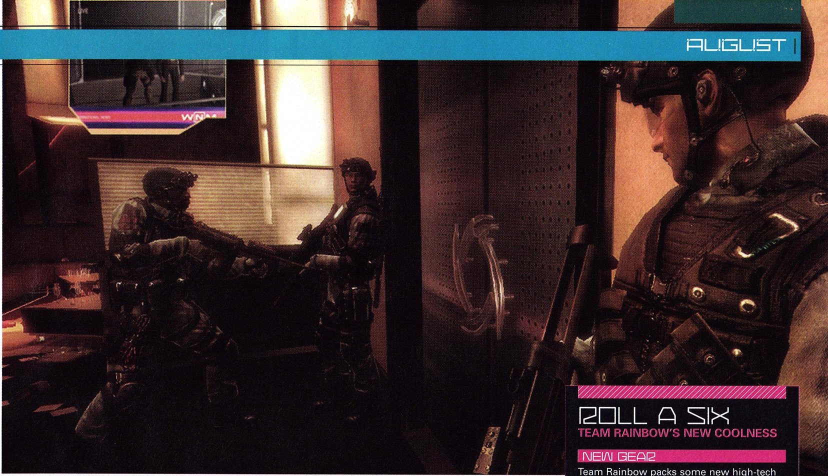
After the sweeping success of Ubisoft's *Ghost Recon Advance Warfighter* on the Xbox 360, we must confess that the idea of a next-gen *Rainbow Six* is exciting in and of itself. But the developers aren't content to merely next-gen-ify the *Rainbow Six* formula (i.e., just hitting the "higher resolution" button on the dev kit): They're looking to refine and reevaluate the fundamental gameplay of the series, aiming for a game that is, at once, both more tactical and more action-packed (see the sidebars for a piece-by-piece evaluation of the game's new features).

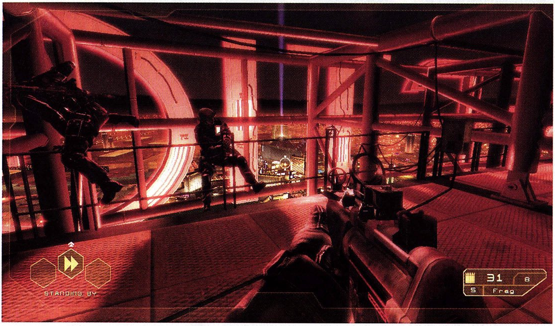
Part of that initiative is the startlingly realistic setting. Contrary to what we've come to expect from games like *GTA: San Andreas* or *Hitman: Blood Money*, the casino settings of *Rainbow Six* are more than just skeletal sketches of gambling halls. Instead, these dens of excess are jam-packed with very realistic-looking slot machines, blackjack tables, and roulette wheels.

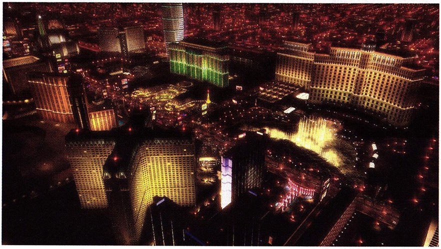
But don't expect to be shooting up the Hard Rock or the Mandalay Bay; while the game will include some familiar features like an Eiffel Tower similar to the one outside Paris Las Vegas or a fountain show remarkably like the one in front of the Bellagio, *Rainbow Six*'s fine gambling establishments will be, alas, fictional.

> THESE CASINOS ARE JAM-PACKED WITH VERY REALISTIC SLOT MACHINES...

Though Ubisoft is planning for a fall release, it's important to note that first, the game has yet to be concept-approved by Sony for the PS3 (generally a minor technicality); and second, it was not playable at E3 (though there was both a guided demonstration and a dancing girl on a pole), which is a little more worrisome with regard to a fall release. As with any game, though, we'd rather have it be late than be rushed.







VIVA...
While the *Rainbow Six* games have looked pretty snazzy, they've mostly tended to be set in pretty drab places. But now that we're on the PS3, a neon-crazy town like Vegas can make its glitzy appearance. You won't get all of Vegas, but you can still make out the Luxor-like pyramid in the above screen.

ROLL A SIX
TEAM RAINBOW'S NEW COOLNESS

NEW GEAR

Team Rainbow packs some new high-tech gadgetry for this outing. First, a fiber-optic cable camera similar to Sam Fisher's most useful toy lets you peer under closed doors to scope out a room without alerting anyone inside.

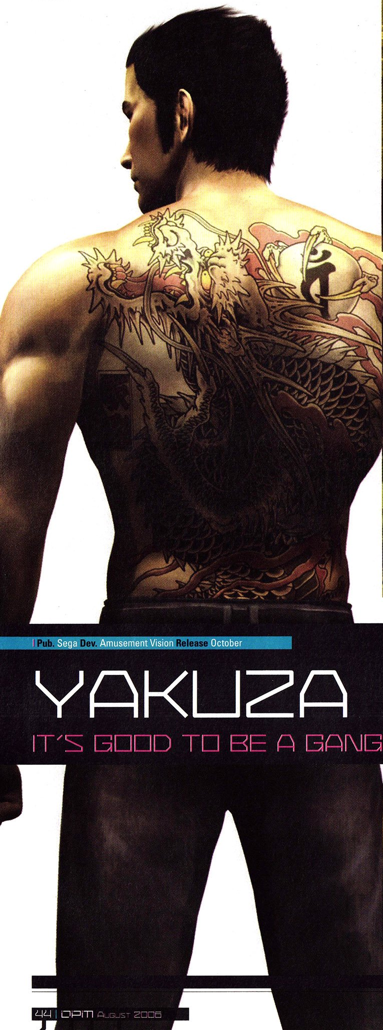
The other big addition is rappelling gear, which allows your characters to descend vertical faces—like, say, the towers of hotel-casinos. If you spot anything of interest inside, you can break through windows for a dramatic entry; you can even position your character upside down in order to free both hands for efficient firearm use.

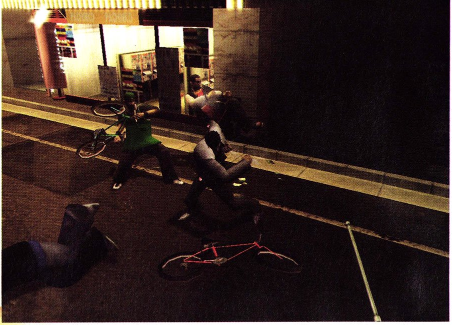
NEW SKILLS

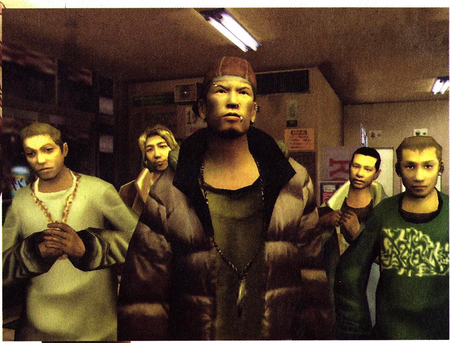
Ubisoft is touting *Rainbow Six: Vegas*'s advanced teammate AI as "next-generation technology," but more interesting is a clever new method of directing your fellow Rainbow members. You can now use your targeting reticule—even through the stealth snake-cam—to prioritize targets before entering a room. For example, if you face a room with three terrorists, but only two of them hold hostages at gunpoint, you can designate those two as primary targets. The result is that once you give the command to enter the room, you can dispatch all significant threats in mere seconds.

NEW MOVES

In an effort to make it easier to instantly recognize your different teammates, the designers are putting quite an emphasis on realistic animation this time out. It's such a priority, in fact, that they've hired Hollywood talent to help instill each character with distinct and different movement styles. Animator Aaron Gilman, who's worked on such films as *The Matrix Revolutions*, *Hellboy*, and *Constantine*, was brought in for just this purpose.



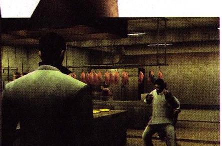


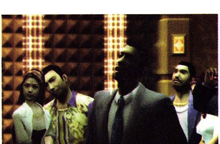


Pub. Sega **Dev.** Amusement Vision **Release** October

YAKUZA

IT'S GOOD TO BE A GANGSTA





Most of us live regular lives: We wake up at normal times, go to work or school, come home, chill out, go to bed, repeat. But now you can break out of that routine and try on one the many different faces of life as a yakuza on this month's gargantuan demo, available only in *OPM*.

ON THE JOB

When you're a yakuza, you learn to keep your friends close, your enemies closer, and your fists closest of all so you can beat the crap out of people.

STUNTMAN

Our first recommendation is that you go through the training to learn the fighting mechanics. The various lessons will teach you the combos necessary to do things like give uppercuts, flip people over your head, and slam them up against walls. This will also give you the life skills necessary to survive in the messy yakuza world. Go on—it's fun!

DEMOLITION MAN

After you learn *how* to move, you'll be able to throw down with the big guys. See how long you can last against wave after wave of other yakuza blokes, random street thugs, and a bunch of other people of ill repute. Don't forget that you can pick up objects and dropped weapons from the ground and use them to bash in people's heads.

INNOCENT MAN

A quick setup: Kazuma is part of the Dojima crime family and hangs around with his childhood friend Nishiki and their gal pal Yumi. Trouble gets stirred up when a captain from a rival gang (the Tojo clan) is murdered, 10 billion yen go missing, and Yumi is suddenly nowhere to be found. Kazuma must clear his own name, find Yumi, and figure out if his oldest friend is double-crossing him. After watching the intro, see how far you can get in the story.

PLAYTIME

It's important to relax in order to counter the effects of a high-stress job, and the world of *Yakuza* offers you many alternatives.

SPORTSMAN

Visit the batting cages; five different levels are available, ranging from beginner to major league. Use the D-pad to adjust your position on the mat, then press X to swing. Increased difficulty levels mean that you'll be getting more complex pitches at increased and varied speeds, and if you hit 10 or more home runs out of 20 pitches, you win a prize! (We'll give you a hint about one of the prizes: It rhymes with "famine dice hole.")

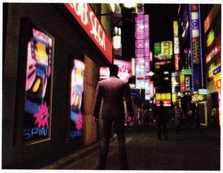
GAMBLING MAN

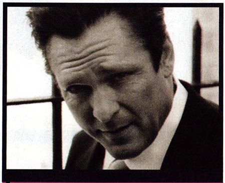
Stop by the casino and try your luck. You have the option of playing blackjack, baccarat, or roulette—and if you don't know the rules, you can ask at the front for instructions. Afterward, buy yourself a little prize with your winnings—we opted for the decorative plate. Fancy!

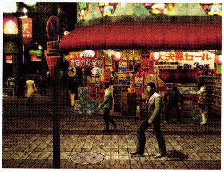
LADIES' MAN

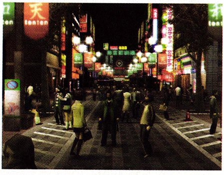
Choose between the lovely Aya or sultry Erina, then see how fast you can blow through your 300,000-yen bankroll as you decide whether to woo them with champagne or beer, fresh fruit or fish jerky, roses or meat buns. After you've plied them with food, drink and presents, try to sweet-talk them into more than just conversation. |

KEEP FRIENDS CLOSE, ENEMIES CLOSER, AND FISTS CLOSEST OF ALL.









CAN YOU HEAR ME NOW?

We'd been hoping that the North American release of *Yakuza* would keep the original Japanese voice acting and add English subtitles, but that won't be happening. However, Sega's gotten a star-studded lineup to perform the English-language voiceovers. Here's who's been announced so far:

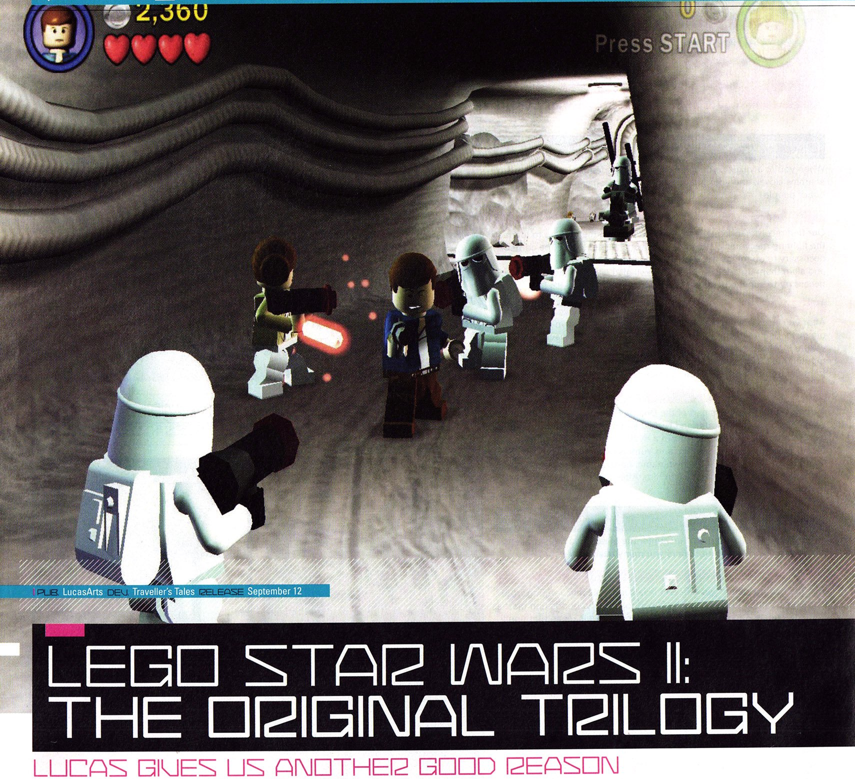
Michael Madsen (pictured above)
Shimano, a yakuza boss

Michael Rosenbaum
Nishiki, Kazuma's childhood friend

Eliza Dushku
Yumi, Kazuma's girlfriend

Rachel Leigh Cook
Reina, owner of the Serena hostess bar

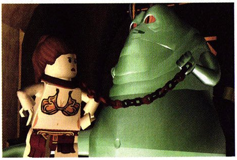
Mark Hamill
Majima, a crazy yakuza boss

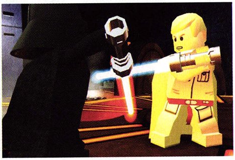


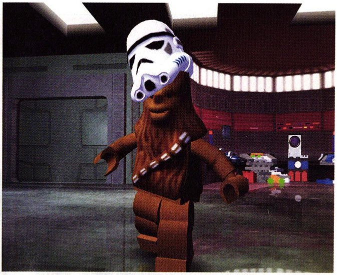
PUB. LucasArts DEV. Traveller's Tales RELEASE September 12

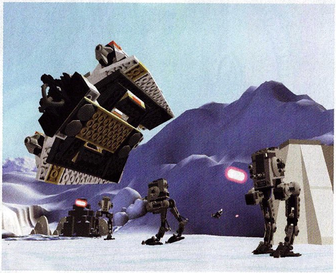
LEGO STAR WARS II: THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY

LUCAS GIVES US ANOTHER GOOD REASON TO FORGET EPISODES I, II, III









Lego Star Wars was one of the biggest surprises of 2005, and not just because it was a damn fine game when no one—not even George Lucas—thought it could or needed to be. Who could blame Lucas for letting Eidos publish the game? After all, it was a Lego title—meaning strictly for kids—and it was developed by Traveller's Tales (*Chronicles of Narnia*), a developer not normally associated with critical acclaim. Despite the *Episode III* tie-in, *Lego Star Wars* was destined to be nothing more than another licensed product.

But surprise us the game did, with its tongue-in-cheek, action-packed send-up of *Episodes I, II,* and *III* (Scooter gave it a 4/5!). And a kids' game? Nope—turns out, according to LucasArts, half the people who bought the game were over 18.

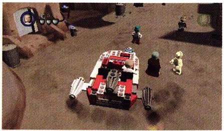
Thus, the happy twist for *Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy* is that it's now one of the more anticipated games of 2006, especially since it's being timed to ship with the DVD release of the original (and unchanged—finally!) trilogy. This time, LucasArts is the publisher—and, given that *LSWII* is their console game this fall, the company appears to be treating it like, well, a real game. *Lego Stars Wars II*'s focus is appropriately on the original *Episodes IV, V,* and *VI* (aka the good ones) and we follow our Empire-toppling heroes from the first Leia/Vader encounter in *A New Hope* through the ewok "yub nub" festivities in *Return of the Jedi*. While the cheeky humor and basic gameplay (level-based, four-member team action where you switch characters on the fly) remain intact, LucasArts is upping the features ante in some significant ways.

To begin with, you can now build and ride vehicles. These pretty much run the gamut—landspeeders, AT-STs, speeder bikes, and, of course, X-wings—and several missions require vehicles (the Death Star run, duh!). These are free-roaming affairs—unlike the on-rails missions of the first game—and, in Free Play, you can switch out ships (a Y-wing for an X-wing, anyone?).

All of your *Star Wars* favorites are available—Leia, Luke, Obi-Wan, Han...you get the picture—for up to 50 playable characters. But there's also an extensive create-a-character mode in which you can mix and match to your heart's content (Chewy's head on Leia's slave-outfit body, maybe?) and play your creation in Free Play. And if you load a saved game from the first *Lego Star Wars*, you can unlock another 54 characters for a total of—wait for it—104 playables. As Obi-Wan would say, "That's no moon."

Loads of fun hidden levels (the jacuzzi-based one's hilarious), new character attacks, two-player co-op, adaptive difficulty for greater challenge, and the ability for any non-droid character to build (it's not just for those strong in the Force anymore) round out this surprise sequel.

LUCASARTS APPEARS TO BE TREATING THIS LIKE, WELL, A REAL GAME.



PORTABLE WARS

If you want a similar but different and portable experience, the PSP version adds the following: co-op play and character exchange via ad-hoc Wi-Fi, Challenge Mode to unlock 18 additional characters, and the last levels of each episode from the previous game.

GREAT, ER, OK MOMENTS IN LEGO PLAYSTATION HISTORY

Sure, there's been steady improvement over the years, but it took a generous jolt of the Force for Lego games to get really good. Here's a rundown of PlayStation titles featuring our favorite building blocks—and what we thought of each.

LEGO RACERS
PS1 **1999**
OPM score: Not rated

LEGO STUNT RALLY
PS1 2000
OPM score: Not rated

LEGO ROCK RAIDERS
PS1 2000
OPM score: 1/5

LEGO ISLAND 2: THE BRICKSTER'S REVENGE
PS1 **2001**
OPM score: 2.5/5

LEGO RACERS 2
PS2 **2001**
OPM score: 2.5/5

ISLAND XTREME STUNTS
PS2 **2002**
OPM score: 3.5/5

LEGO SOCCER MANIA
PS2 **2002**
OPM score: 3.5/5

PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE October 2006

FINAL FANT

THE GRANDEST AND MOST FINAL PS2 FANTASY

ASY XII

While many *Final Fantasy* titles start with some snazzy action, none so far have begun the game by murdering the player outright (for dramatic purposes, we're ignoring the two soldiers who get ended in the beginning of *FFVI*—they deserved it, anyhow).

After watching the heavily political and grim introduction to *Final Fantasy XII*, you are thrust into the role of a young soldier named Reks. As you learn about *FFXII's* radical new battle system (see page 50) from your commanding officer, General Basch, you find yourself separated from the rest of the squad. You then guide Reks into a room where not only do you see the dead body of the king you were tasked with protecting, but you also see your own commander, Basch, stab Reks in the stomach. That's when you quickly appreciate the unique vision behind *FFXII*.

FFXII producer Akitoshi Kawazu explains the grim prologue: "This is the coming-of-age title for *FFXII*, the time when the series grows up and examines mature themes usually reserved for novels and major motion pictures. Death and sacrifice, two very prevalent themes of *FFXII*, are commonalities of war. We felt the need to convey this by bringing it to the forefront from the start." To that, we say: "Yikes."

Yet as you play the game, which starts off with a common street thief trying to awkwardly and immaturely rebel against "The Man," you soon start feeling the grandiose scale of the story. It's not just about saving the world or the princess, it's about the fall of empires, the maneuvers of politicians, the betrayals of patriots, and the bloodshed that war brings. Kawazu comments, "*FFT*'s development staff is renowned for their complex stories, and to rob *FFXII* of their vision would be to rob the game of their creative genius. We set out to create a game that fell in with the likes of *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* and *Vagrant Story*." We asked scenario writer Daisuke Watanabe about the challenge of writing a complex, politically driven story, and he answered, "We think *FF* fans are the hardest judges to please of all gamers, but we believe that they want an interesting story rather than a simple story."

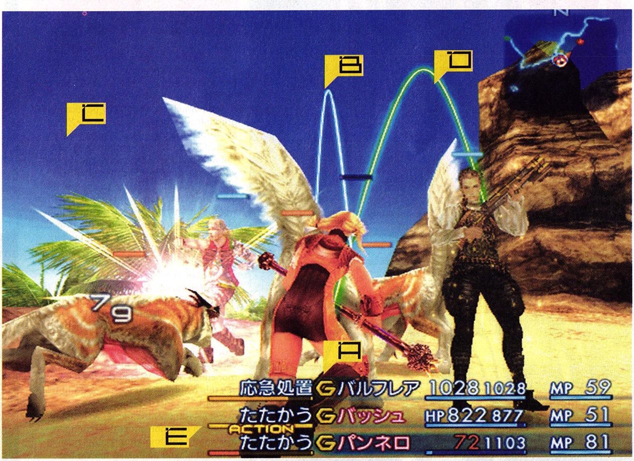
However, even with the grand changes in gameplay and story line, this is still very much a *Final Fantasy* game. The team has created not just a great adventure to end the franchise's life on the PS2, but what may be considered a love letter to the series. As you'll see in the next pages, the game is filled with sly references and jokes that allude all the way back to the original *Final Fantasy*. This is an *FF* title that is made for the series' most die-hard fans....

AIRSHIPS AHOY!

FFXII writer Daisuke Watanabe describes the *FF* series as "an airship soaring through the skies. I think it's the symbol of *FF*, something that searches beyond the horizons for a new world, not fearing change and continuously evolving."

COMBAT EVOLVED

FFXII'S COMBAT TAKES ON A NEW DIMENSION


C
B
D
79
A
応急処置 G バルフレア 1028 1028 MP 59
たたかう G バッシュ HP 822 877 MP 51
ACTION
たたかう G パンネロ 72 1103 MP 81
E

A

This G indicates the status of a character's Gambit: Lit up means the gambits are active and your character acts on their own; unlit means that you need to remember to manually control this character in combat.

B

This blue line connects your party character to the current attack target.

C

This wolf would've had a red line indicating his target, but he got hit first.

D

This green line travels from one character to whichever other character they're targeting for the purpose of casting a beneficial spell or using an item.

E

The Wait-Time Gauge is a timer of sorts; after inputting a command, you have to wait for it to fill up (it's instant when you're using an item, a decent speed when attacking, and slow when casting a powerful spell). When it fills up, that character executes whatever command they were given (whether determined by Gambit settings or manually).

サーペント D は
かみつきを構えた！
440

BATTLE LANGUAGE

KAWAZU ON THE GENESIS OF THE NEW COMBAT SYSTEM

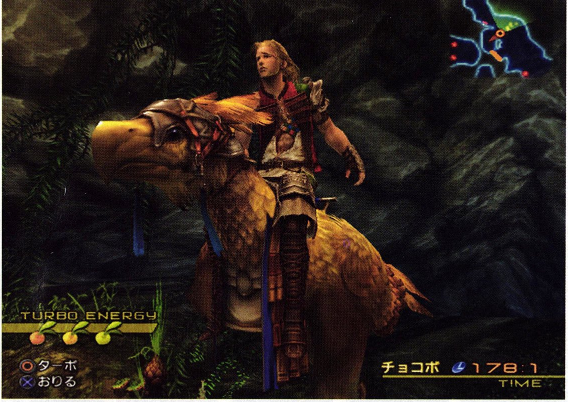
"For years, the directors of the *Final Fantasy* franchise have added their own spins to the Active-Time Battle (ATB) system. For *FFXII*, we wanted to create something revolutionary that would accurately depict the scope and size of the world of Ivalice. We put battle designer Kazutoyo Maehiro up to the task, and he created the Active-Dimension Battle (ADB) system.

"A radical departure from ATB, ADB is a true synergy of exploration and combat. One of the problems with many RPGs is that the combat system takes players out of the game world, wasting precious opportunities to completely immerse them in the universe. By placing both combat and exploration on the same plane, we are giving players a consistent system that keeps them besieged in the game world. And since the action is [continuous], we needed to give players a tool that would allow them to exhibit full control of their characters; this is where the Gambit system comes into play. When you're playing a console RPG, you consistently have to micromanage two or three other characters. With the Gambit system,

> "WE WANTED TO CREATE SOMETHING REVOLUTIONARY."

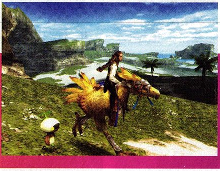
DQ8 VS. FFXII

Maybe you played the *FFXII* demo bundled with *Dragon Quest VIII* and felt underwhelmed. Well, if it didn't make you want to play the game, here's what Kawazu has to say to you: "We'd like to tell [gamers] to keep an open mind and to understand that the game has always been a work in progress. Through the years, we have consistently added elements to improve the overall game, and we're really proud of what we've accomplished."



BOSS
INFORMATION
アルテマは
破壊を構えた！
2 Hits
たたかう ヴァン 2617 2947 MP 545
たたかう アーシェ 3564 3564 MP 560

BOSS
INFORMATION
マティウスは
凍天撃を構えた！
たたかう バルフレア 1434 1434 MP 176
たたかう フラン 1014 スロウ 196



we've created a system that lets players customize each character to the level where the characters would react and behave exactly as the players want, without having to micromanage each of their actions."

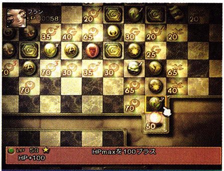
QUICK MISTENINGS

We noticed that Mist Quickenings (the new Limit Breaks, where you execute a powerful special attack that looks flashy as heck) can be chained together. While one character performs a Quickening, if you have enough power left on your mist gauge, you can press a button corresponding to another party member to have them perform a quickening right afterward. Chain a few in a row and you can perform an ultrapowerful one. When we asked, "Why can you chain attacks now?" Maehiro answered: "The previous *FF*s have utilized the Japanese Kabuki-like camerawork and portrayed [magic] with gorgeous visual effects. By making the battle seamless, we thought that it wouldn't be user-friendly if we took the camera control from the player as frequently, and there were also some issues with the PS2 memory, so we had to inevitably give up some of those aspects. That's why we made the 'flashy' Mist Quickening attacks. But one of our concepts of this game was to make a *game,* and we thought that it would be boring to just watch the effects, so we added a game aspect to this portion as well. We believe that, through this, we were able to correspond to various styles of gameplay."

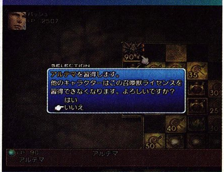
MIST QUICKENINGS CAN BE CHAINED TOGETHER.

ROUGH RIDERS

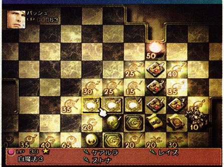
As usual, you can always expect chocobos to be alive and squawking in the world of Ivalice. You can rent a chocobo for about 500 gil and zip around the map really fast. Enemies won't attack mounted players, so while it all sounds groovy, there is a downside: a time limit. Once it's reached, the chocobo kicks you off and returns to its stall. Also, you can fight wild chocobos—if you're a big meanie.



HPmaxを100プラス



アルテマを習得します。
他のキャラクターはこの召喚獣ライセンスを習得できなくなります。よろしいですか？
はい
いいえ



LICENSE TO WIELD

FFXII's license board is perhaps the most intimidating, yet flexible, class/leveling/skill system in a *Final Fantasy* title to date. As you kill monsters, you gain license points; you spend these points to unlock squares on the board. Not only can the character then use the spells/weapons/items/skills that were written on the square, but the adjacent squares open up for more spending.

Kawazu describes the concept of the license board: "The license board continues our vision of letting the adventure unfold as the player imagines it. In other games, characters are placed into clearly defined roles and offered little in the way of customization. With the license board, players choose how they want their characters to evolve. Throughout our development, we came to notice that our characters didn't fall into the typical RPG stereotypes. Ashe, who at first glance looks a little frail, exudes the strength and spirit of Dalmasca. With this in mind, we didn't want to typecast our characters, so we made them infinitely customizable, with character development resting [in the hands] of the players."

HERE COMES THE JUDGE

In *Final Fantasy Tactics*, these magistrates were like referees for your battles. But they have a different role for *Final Fantasy XII*—in fact, judges are such an important part of the story that one of them is even incorporated into game's logo. Kawazu describes *FFXII*'s panel of arbiters thusly: "The judges are the personification of the Archadian Empire: Strong, imposing, and revered. When the judges make an appearance, they're meant to evoke feelings of awe and admiration. We wouldn't call them 'knights of terror,' though. They're a strong force to be reckoned with, but underneath they are human beings with feelings and emotions. As you play the game, you'll learn more about the judges and explore their humanity." Watanabe interjects: "The judges are tied down by the responsibilities that come with power, and are the symbol that then makes 'freedom' (the story's theme) stand out even more."

JUDGE MASTER
GABRANTH

The strongest of the judges, hence the word "Master" in his title. He's also the most conflicted of the five—he completely supports the Archadian Empire and its ways, but he doesn't always believe in the actions that the Emperor asks of him. He also has a surprising link to one of the main characters.

JUDGE
ZARGABAATH

A strict military man with absolute loyalty to the Archadian Empire. His loyalty tends to make him one of the more ruthless judges, as he'll do anything for the Empire without question. Which makes him the biggest yes-man among all the judges. He also schemes…a lot (much like Judge Ghis).

JUDGE
BERGAN

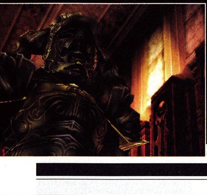
The most obsessed of all the judges in regard to the Empire's laws and ways of dictatorship over the people of Archadia. He works directly under Lord Vayne and strongly believes that people must be governed under military control/dictatorship (the *FFXII* team internally nicknamed him the "Mini-Hitler").

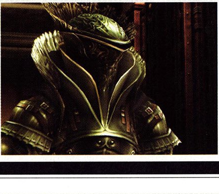
JUDGE
GHIS

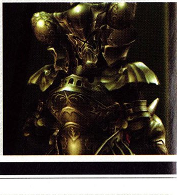
One of the judges principally tasked with the protection of Prince Larsa. He's also the most arrogant of the five judges; he thinks he has more control and rule than he actually does. As expected, he's also very militant; he's the first judge the main characters run into. And man alive, he's a difficult battle.

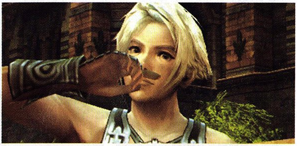
JUDGE
DRACE

The only female judge. While her primary responsibility is guarding Prince Larsa, she's also taken on the role of Larsa's personal tutor and advisor. While she's a patriot like the rest of the judges—and generally supports Archadia—she doesn't necessarily agree with all the actions that the Empire undertakes.









IT'S YOUR PARTY AND YOU CAN DO WHAT YOU WANT TO

An interesting thing to note about *FFXII's* protagonists is that there's no one main character. Everyone has an in-depth, personal story and unique viewpoint on the whole war, and you can switch characters around for story's sake. We asked Kawazu why the dev team decided to have a large and flexible ensemble cast instead of a single "star" like in previous *FFs*, and he had this to say: "Customization is one of the key elements of *FFXII*, and this carries over to the story line as well." Here's a quick rundown of the six main people in your party:

VAAN

The metrosexual that gamers love to hate. He's a streetwise thief living it up in Rabanastre, and it's his attempt to break into Consul Vayne's castle (in order to steal Archadian treasure and give it back to the Dalmascan people, Robin Hood–style) that results in his joining the Resistance movement.

ASHE

She's the daughter of Dalmasca's late ruler, King Raminas, and the widow of Prince Rasler, who gets an arrow to the neck during the Battle of Nalbina shown in the intro. She hates the Archadians for taking over her land—and particularly hates Basch for his role in her father's death. To this end, she leads the Resistance movement against the Archadian occupation. She also turns out to be very important for the political machinations of certain enemy characters.

BALTHIER

A sky pirate who sails around and has all sorts of sky piratey adventures. He prefers to stay out of the politics of the whole Archadian/Dalmascan conflict. He has a couple of big secrets from his past (let's just say his résumé has another entry besides "sky pirate"), and he's one of the most popular characters for both gamers and the development staff.

FRAN

Balthier's companion and a natural at wielding weapons (i.e., she's got a lot of weapon squares unlocked on her license board). Think of her as the Chewbacca to Balthier's Han Solo.

BASCH

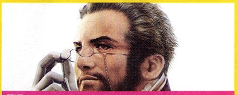
A Dalmascan general (he was in charge of protecting Prince Rasler right before Rasler got ended) now considered a traitor to both the Archadians and the Dalmascans due to his being caught in a room with a very dead King Raminas. He also shanks Reks during that same regicidal incident. Being a gruff older soldier makes him one of the more popular characters in the game.

PENELO

Vaan's childhood friend who tags along for the adventure. Like Fran is initially weapon-focused in her license board, Penelo is magic-heavy with her license board.

NO SECOND BANANAS HERE:

We could probably spend a whole lot of pages detailing the stories of all the other characters, but that would spoil things—so instead, here's a quick look at some of the other players in *FFXII*'s story:



CID

Hey, when there's a *Final Fantasy*, there's gotta be a dude named Cid. Our favorite Cid is the crazy bearded mechanic from *FFIV*. This Cid isn't as gentle, as he's a nefarious scientist who's researching Nethicite (this weird element imbued with magical power) for the Empire. Like Judge Master Gabranth, Cid has an interesting link to one of the main party characters.

VAYNE

He starts off as the new consul for the formerly-Dalmascan-now-Archadian city of Rabanastre, and talks about how he wants to foster peace and goodwill between the conquered Dalmascans and the new Archadian authority. Yet, later on, you learn that he's not only the new mayor in town, but he's the son of the current Archadian emperor—hence, he's the next head honcho should his father undergo some "unfortunate accident." Hmm....

LARSA

Vayne's younger brother, and the logical next emperor should both Vayne and their father, Emperor Gramis, be killed. Of all the Archadians, Larsa is perhaps the most sympathetic to the plight of the Dalmascan people.

REKS

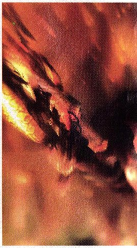
Soldier in Basch's squad. Also the older brother of Vaan, he serves as the main tutorial device for *FFXII* before being brutally shanked by Basch.

VOSSLER

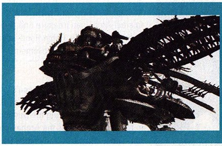
A fellow soldier in Basch's squad. In the prologue, he, Basch, and Reks work their way through the royal Dalmascan castle (when it gets attacked by the Archadian army) to try to rescue King Raminas. He disappears after the prologue, only to show up as part of the Resistance movement. Oftentimes he's a guest character in your party.

SERIOUS SUMMONING

THE FF VERSION OF "I CHOOSE YOU, PIKACHU!"

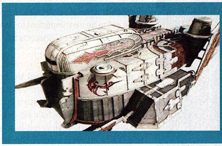


In *Final Fantasy Tactics,* the lucavi were demons who wanted to resurrect their leader, Altima. Part of their plot was to help the Church manipulate the Lion War, as the bloodshed would help in Altima's resurrection. Many of these lucavi are in *FFXII*...as summons (or "espers" in the game). Espers replace two of your active party members and are fully controllable by the player in battle; also, note that when one character learns to summon an esper, only he or she can summon it (in other words, Vaan and Ashe cannot both learn to summon Belias). Some of these espers are not only lucavi from *FFT*, but bosses or creatures from previous *FF* titles. Maehiro explains: "We used the lucavi from *FFT* as espers, but we also needed to create some that didn't show up in *FFT*. We could have used famous characters like Golbez [one of the key villains in *FFIV*], but each player has strong feelings for each character. We didn't want people's feelings toward the characters to change, so we used characters that fans remembered as the symbol of evil: the last bosses from the previous *FF*s. You can bring around the espers during battle, so *FF* fans may be able to experience the sensation of dominating and controlling these strong bosses. Additionally, as for why there are more monsters that are influenced from pre-*FFV*, that is simply because I like the older *FF*s."



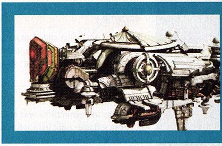
ALEXANDER

This giant, evil-looking airship is actually named after a gigantic castle that drops down on bad dudes and dispenses holy damage. He was first spotted in *Final Fantasy VI* and went 3D for his appearances in *FFVII* and *FFVIII*. You can still spot him in *FFIX* (he was part of Alexandria Castle), but he wasn't summonable and hasn't been present in a game since.



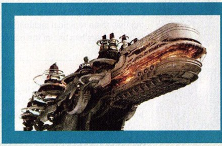
ATOMOS

This squat little airship is named after a baddie that showed up in the GBA remake of the first *Final Fantasy*. He was also a bad dude in *FFV*, but you weren't able to summon him until *FFIX*, which was also the last time he appeared in an *FF* release. His main attack uses gravity/wormholes, so that might provide people with a clue as to this airship's attack capabilities....



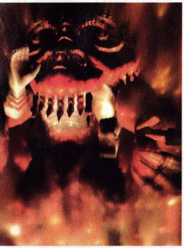
CARBUNCLE

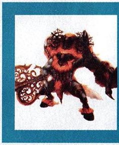
This mighty-looking airship with the shining gem on one end is named after a furry critter with a ruby on its head. Yes, the same little Carbuncle that comes in and casts Reflect on your party starting in *FFV*, then *VI*, *VIII*, *IX*, and even *XI*. He even runs around in both *Final Fantasy Tactics* games. And now he goes from being a cute little...thing with a ruby on its head to a big honking airship.



IFRIT

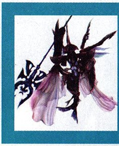
This bad boy made his first appearance in the release of *FFIII* and has been present in every single *Final Fantasy* game since. And by "every," we mean even the two *Tactics* games. We particularly like the straightforward, charge-forward-with-fire-sprites version that was used in *FFIV*. We think it's pretty cool that this airship looks like a giant fire-breathing whale.





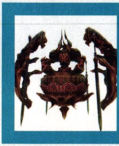
BELIAS

The name Belias is biblical in origin, but the esper comes from the original *FFT*; he was a lucavi who possessed the warrior Wiegraf, who happened to be the hardest nonoptional/story-required boss (in our opinion) in the *FF* series. In *FFT*, Belias was mistakenly translated as Velius, but that's been rectified in *FFXII*. Belias' use of hellfire and generally evil appearance seem to make him the new Ifrit for *FFXII*.



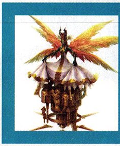
MATEUS

The totema of the humans from back in *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. Just like Belias and his fire are the substitute Ifrit for *FFXII*, Mateus and her ice-based attacks seem to make her the new Shiva for *FFXII*. Also, fans claim that Mateus is the name of the Emperor of Palamecia back in *FFII*. Those same fans, however, may not know that Mateus is also the name of a Portuguese sparkling wine.



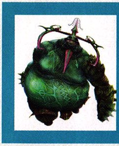
CHAOS

This bad boy has a hefty special attack (he basically breaks the universe), and was the final boss in the first *Final Fantasy*. Chaos was also the subject of that game's bizarre time-paradox story, where he was created, but sent to the past; but he himself sent his creators into the future for them to then send him back to the past, and, er, he possessed the body of Garland, who was the first boss in *FF*. Whew.



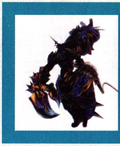
ULTIMA

The big, bad mamma-jamma who was the reason why the other lucavi were manipulating the Lion War back in *Final Fantasy Tactics*—all just to bring her back so that she could regulate the land. Well, except that her name was translated as Altima back in *FFT*. For *FFTA*, she showed up as the totema of those weird doglike nu mou people. For *FFXII*, she has a really powerful Holy attack.



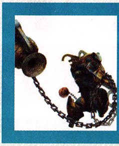
CUCHULAINN

Remember in *Final Fantasy Tactics* when you, as Ramza, killed that crazy Cardinal Draclau, who was in league with bad people—and because you ended him, you're branded a heretic? Well, Cuchulainn is the lucavi who possessed the not-so-good Cardinal. Cuchulainn is also the name of an Irish folk hero. He totally rocks a spear that sings for his enemies' blood in Irish folklore.



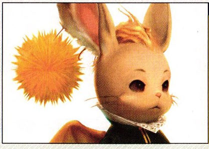
ZEROMUS

Oh, man—this guy brings back memories. No, we're not thinking of how Zeromus looks a lot like Anima from *FFX*. We're talking old-school *FFIV*, when (spoilers!) your party killed a bad dude named Zemus and his pure hate rose from his body and took on the form of a big, bad final-boss monster called Zeromus. And just like in *FFIV*, the *FFXII* version has an awesome attack named Big Bang.



FAMFRIT

The totema of the moogles in *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*. What's a totema, you ask? Why, it's a spirit guardian of a sacred crystal in Ivalice! Destroy the crystal, and its guardian joins your group. Except totema are race-specific, so in *FFTA*, only moogles could summon Famfrit. But in *FFXII*, you just need to assign him to a character and he'll be at your beck and call no matter whom you choose.



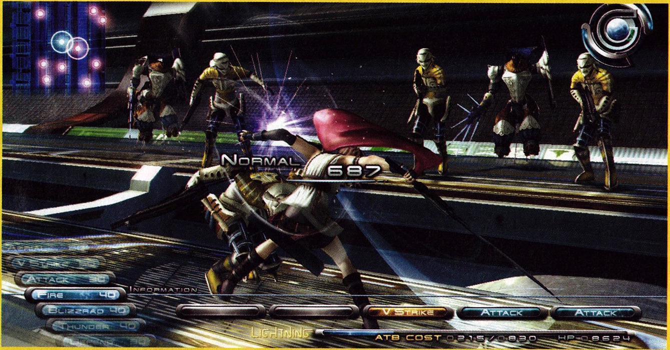
MEET THE NEW MOG, SAME AS THE OLD MOG

Moogles also make a new and revised appearance in *FFXII*. This one pictured here is Montblanc, the same moogle from *FFTA* who teaches the player about the world of Ivalice. And like in *FFTA*, Montblanc runs his own clan that the player characters join.

PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE 2007

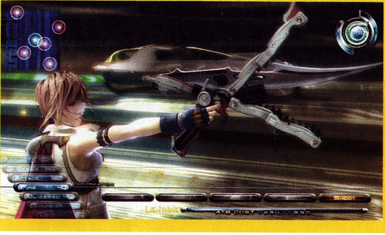
FINAL FANTASY XIII

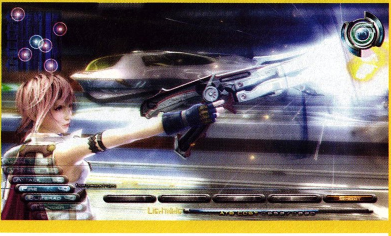
13 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT FFXIII ON THE PS3



PRERENDERED?

So there is a fair amount of cynicism when it comes to PS3 game demos, due largely to memories of how, when the *Killzone* PS3 trailer was shown last year, rumors surfaced about how prerendered it was. One thing we've noticed lately is that real-time in-game stuff tends to look a bit jaggier than prerendered CG, as though the antialiasing isn't fully turned on or something. So one helpful tip is that if it looks too smooth to be true, it's probably fake.





1

Of the many teams within Square Enix, which one was tasked with creating the first next-gen *Final Fantasy*? Why, the same folks who made the previous "new *Final Fantasy* title for the next generation of PlayStation"! Namely, the team behind *Final Fantasy X* for the PS2.

2

Producer Yoshinori Kitase outlines *FFXIII*'s basic concept as the "formal evolution of *Final Fantasy*. [In] *FFX*, we tried to conclude and wrap up the traditional RPG. In this game, we'd like to show the next form of RPGs. To be more specific, in the traditional RPG, the game flow is pretty much the same: You go into a town, talk to people, go out of town, and enter battles. We want to start looking at that flow and revolutionize it in a way that it may surprise people to learn that this is a *Final Fantasy* game. I'm thinking it will be an extraordinary new form in RPGs."

3

Director Motomu Toriyama on his experience in creating *FFX* and applying that experience to *FFXIII*: "We learned how to exceed and evolve the portrayal of the dramatic essence by showing the small changes in expression and emotions from what we did on *FFX*. I would be lying if I said we would be able to go back to the PS2 after creating the *FFVII* technical demo for the PS3.

"It's always exciting for a creator to be able to build something new on a new platform. We have spent an extraordinary amount of time for the preproduction of this game. For example, we made it so that each tree and each sign would have a meaning to it. It's not that we just want to make the visuals realistic; we wanted to develop a fully realized futuristic setting. As it stands, it was inevitable [that we would] rebuild this project for the next-generation platform."

4

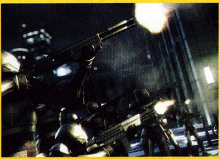
To that end, here's what we heard about the combat system: It's still good ol' Active-Time Battle (ATB), except it's been tweaked to be even faster and a bit more "actiony" (as indicated by the trailer). The development team also cryptically mentioned the use of an "added time axis," which could mean anything from timing button presses that pull off special attacks to abilities that alter time within battle.

5

Another big factor in the combat system is the use of the vertical axis. Notice that gray thing on the heroine's finger? That controls gravity. You (or she) snaps it on and off effortlessly. Combine her ability to control gravity with her acrobatics, and you can see how vertical position in combat is now more important than in previous *FF* titles.

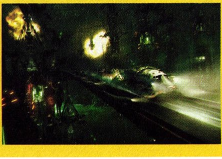
6

Weapon design is being handled by Tetsu Tsukamoto, who worked on the costume design for *FFX-2*. His experience in creating multiple costume changes for the *FFX-2* girls probably helped in designing a gun that transforms into a sword.



SLINGING A GUNBLADE

You probably think that Squenix invented the gunblade when Squall swung it around in *FFVIII*, but they've been around for a while. In the armory of Wawel Castle in Poland, one can find early flintlock pistols attached to daggers and other blades.



AN EVEN SMALLER CLIFFS NOTES FOR FINAL FANTASY VERSUS XIII

01 The *FFVII: Advent Children* team is creating the movie scenes.

02 The game system is made by the *Kingdom Hearts II* team. It won't be an updated version of the *KHII* engine but a whole new one built just for this game.

03 The theme? Nomura answers: "Bond."

04 The general story: The main character's kingdom has protected the crystal for many generations. Those dudes with the medieval armor and machine guns are from the outer world, and the main character is protecting the crystal from them. Said main character isn't actually the king, but he's part of the king's lineage.

05 Nomura comments on the look of his game, "*Versus XIII* is supposed to resemble the modern-day world. I wanted to make this world resemble our world we live in today. This is integrated to the story as well, but the reason why I chose to use a Shakespeare quote at the beginning of the trailer is to make the tie with the real world we live in today."

7

Kitase on the game engine: "A team of experts was formed to develop a special engine with a vast array of elements capable of handling cinematics, advanced audio processing, graphics-engine physics calculation, and special effects rendering. This impressive development platform is called the White Engine."

8

Toriyama on the female character that was shown in the trailer: "I wouldn't say that she's the main character. It just happens to be that she was the character that we chose to feature in the trailer. However, it is true that we wanted to have a strong, independent woman as one of the main characters in the game. To accomplish this, we asked [character designer] Tetsuya Nomura to design a strong and independent female character, both mentally and physically. She was the end result."

Nomura interjects, "The order I got from Toriyama was to create a muscular and athletic girl. I had a lot of trouble trying to create her."

9

Toriyama on the setting of *FFXIII*: "The world of *FFXIII* depicts a level of civilization more advanced than ever seen [before] in the *Final Fantasy* series. This futuristic world exists in a time when technology and magic have combined and developed into a new form. We decided to go for a more futuristic, sci-fi look because we thought that it would fit the new world being portrayed on the PlayStation 3 and serve as a indicator as to what the future of gaming might be."

10

Coproducer Shinji Hashimoto on the overall nature of the Fabula Nova Crystallis project and its effect on *FFXIII*: "Consider that development is simultaneously ongoing for three *FFXIII*s—each not only on different platforms but [featuring] different worlds and stories that are bound by a common mythology [of the crystal]. By gaining inspiration from this mythology, these independent *FFXIII*s evolve uniquely. The Fabula Nova Crystallis project is not a collection of sequels or ports but several original titles that exist alongside each other."

11

Why put such a big emphasis on a freakin' crystal? Kitase answers, "Because the crystal is the symbol of the *FF* series. The compilation of *FFVII* [games] has the central theme of [the original] *FFVII*, but this project is starting from zero. So that's why we thought it would be good to create a centerpiece for this project and freely evolve from there."

12

Chocobos, moogles, and traditional spell names will still be present.

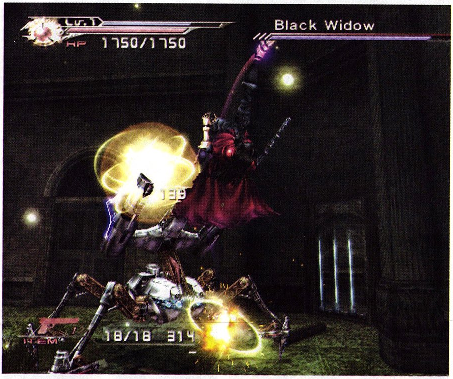
13

FFXIII online? Kitase mentions, "It's still to be determined; if anything, it will be an extra feature but it won't be one of the main features."

PUB. Square Enix **DEV.** Square Enix **RELEASE** Fall

DIRGE OF CERBERUS: FINAL FANTASY VII

WHO LET THE THREE-HEADED DOGS OUT?



HP 1750/1750
Black Widow
114
ITEM
29/40 42

HP 780/780
Azul the Cerulean
ITEM
10/40 217
Limit Breaker 25

Lv. 1
HP 1094/1100
1049
1049
ITEM
24/40 147
Limit Breaker 22

Lv. 1
HP 1750/1750
Black Widow
ITEM
18/18 314

MOG NINJA SUIT

We actually haven't played enough to know who this is, and the file name is just "ninja", but we think it totally rocks that this ninja's costume looks like a moogle. We know that ninjas try to blend in with their surroundings, but this is still strange.

00:00

OK, here we go. Vincent was kind of a cool character in the original *Final Fantasy VII*—hopefully, it'll be fun to see him kicking butt in an action setting.

00:04

There are an awful lot of cut-scenes in the early going—which makes sense, considering this is a Squenix game. The CG looks incredible, especially since it depicts events from the final moments of *Final Fantasy VII*. Oh, wait—no, here are some scenes from events that transpire three years later. Looks good and everything, but c'mon, let's us play the actual game already.

00:07

Finally, we're underway. Seems straightforward at this point. Actually, it's almost reminiscent of something like *Virtua Cop*, where you're pretty much forced to go along a set path and the shooting is made as simplistic as possible. Though here you have the ability to move around and jump, so it's not quite the same, obviously.

00:08

The aiming in this game is pretty easy. All you have to do is get enemies inside the green reticule and an even smaller reticule will show up, indicating the specific enemy that's been targeted.

00:10

Now we're out of the industrial setting and into a more open area—looks like one of the towns from *Final Fantasy VII*. This is where *Dirge* feels more like a standard third-person shooter with some slight exploration elements. And by "exploration elements," we mean the search for ammunition—because you can run out real quick if you aren't careful. It's worth pointing out that using potions, switching weapons, and doing other important stuff like switching to the map is pretty easy, since those commands are mapped to either the D-pad or the shoulder buttons.

00:15

We've encountered the first boss: a helicopter that deploys troops. This isn't all that difficult if you keep your eyes on the helicopter and don't let the other enemies distract you.

00:20

In the next level, you run across different attachments for Vincent's firearms. This seems to be a cool mechanic, since you can mix up the attachments for three of Vincent's guns—but we'll stick with the default weapon for the time being, as it seems to pack a little more punch than what this first attachment initially offers. And we're done.

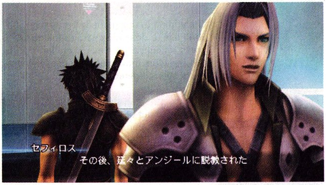
THE FANTASY CONTINUES

SQUARE ENIX'S LONG-RUNNING SERIES IS A HUGE HIT ON MORE THAN JUST THE PLAYSTATION 2

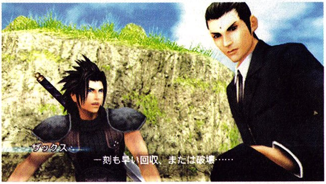
CRISIS CORE: FINAL FANTASY VII

PSP

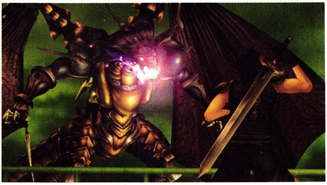
So far Squenix has been superquiet about *Crisis Core*, the first game in the *Final Fantasy VII Compilation* to be developed from the ground up for the PSP. What we *do* know, however, is that Zack, the character that Cloud idolizes in the original *Final Fantasy VII*, plays a huge role—and that it'll probably explain a lot of the backstory behind SOLDIER and how Sephiroth wasn't always a total jerkface.

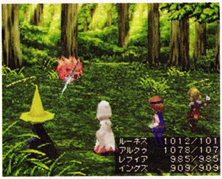


セフィロス
その後、延々とアンジールに説教された

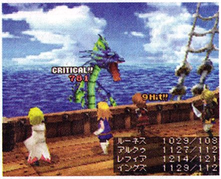


ザックス
一刻も早い回収、または破壊……

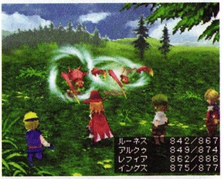




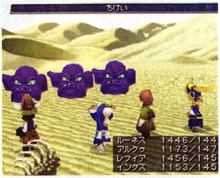
ルーネス 1012/101
アルクゥ 1078/107
レフィア 985/985
イングズ 909/909



ルーネス 1029/108
アルクゥ 1127/112
レフィア 1214/121
イングズ 1129/112

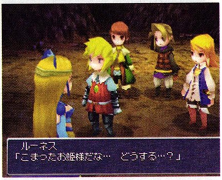


ルーネス 842/867
アルクゥ 849/874
レフィア 862/886
イングズ 875/877

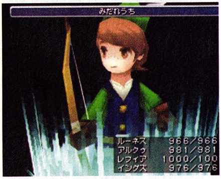


ちけい

ルーネス 1446/144
アルクゥ 1173/147
レフィア 1456/145
イングズ 1153/145



ルーネス
「こまったお姫様だな…　どうする…？」



みだれうち

ルーネス 966/966
アルクゥ 981/981
レフィア 1000/100
イングズ 976/976

FINAL FANTASY III, IV, V, VI

GBA, NINTENDO DS

Wow, that's a whole lot of *Final Fantasy*. Of the four re-releases, the most noteworthy of which is *Final Fantasy III* (pictured above). The original Famicom version never made it to North America, but the game's being redone in full 3D on the DS. We just ask that Squenix consider bringing it out on the PSP as well. *Final Fantasy V* and *VI* were released for the PS1 in *Final Fantasy Anthology*, but this version of *V* will include some new content not found in that version. *Final Fantasy IV*, originally known as *Final Fantasy II* in the U.S., has already been released on a wide variety of platforms—including the PS1, when it was included in *Final Fantasy Chronicles*. The recently released GBA version features updated dialogue and a new arena mode where you just fight the bosses.

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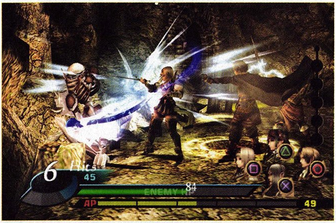
6 Hits
71
ENEMY HP
103
AP
100

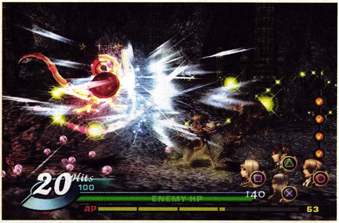
3 Hits
24
ENEMY HP
49
AP
7

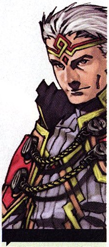
MORE FANTASY

YES, THERE ARE RPGS OTHER THAN FF

OK, we know that there is more to the role-playing landscape than *Final Fantasy* out there. So we scoured both East and West to find the most interesting group of non-*FF* RPGs coming out within the next few months, focusing on the two things RPGers always ask: "How's the combat?" and "What's the story about?"







EYE SEE YOU Hey, this is the big, bad Allfather himself, Odin. Except, we notice that it looks like he has two eyes. Where we come from, we learned that Odin sacrificed one of his eyes to gain the wisdom of the ages. Does this mean that the Odin in *Valkyrie Profile* is totally not wise to the ways of life? Hmm.... Or maybe he loses it later.

PUB. Square Enix **DEV.** Tri-Ace **RELEASE** Winter **PLATFORM** PS2

VALKYRIE PROFILE: SILMERIA

MARCH OF THE BLONDIES

HOW DO I FIGHT?

Take the weird, actiony battle system of *Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth* (described oh-so-succinctly in the review of the new PSP port on page 80). Now display it in 3D. The transition from 2D to 3D doesn't break the combat; in fact, it makes it more strategic. Now you have to worry about your position relative to the enemy or whether you're close enough to attack or be attacked (their attack range is helpfully highlighted by big red circles). You'll be able to pull off maneuvers like attacking baddies from two different directions, or even trying to target specific body parts of an enemy (in an effort to get better drops). Additionally, you can try to end the fight quickly by taking out the leader—tearing through the leader first quickly demoralizes the rest of the enemy party.

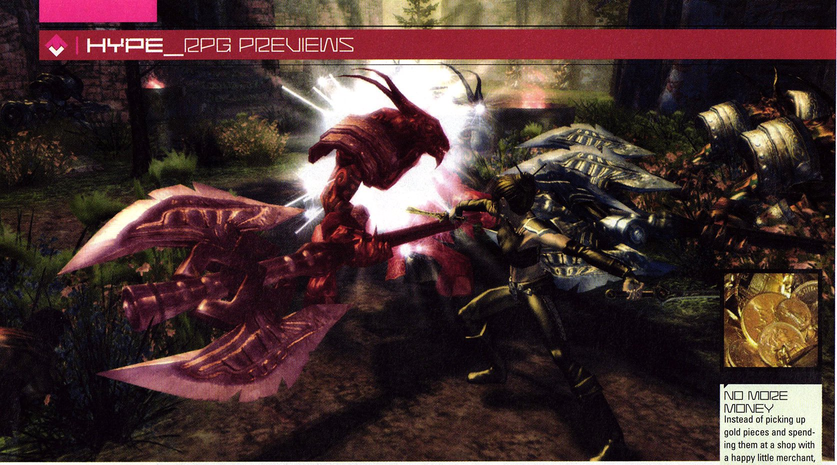
When you're not performing crazy action combos, you're doing some good ol' side-scrolling exploration (rendered in 3D this time, despite the 2D nature of the gameplay) of towns and dungeons. In the dungeons, not only can you freeze enemies and make instant platforms out of crystals (just like in the previous game), but you can also switch places with a frozen enemy (handy for puzzles or weird jumps).

WHY AM I FIGHTING?

You do this because, quite frankly, you're crazy. You can either think of yourself as playing the reincarnated Valkyrie Silmeria in a mortal woman's body, or you can think of yourself as crazy Princess Alicia—who's still alive and cogent when Silmeria's soul gets zapped in. Much of the game is spent with the two-souls-trapped-within-one-blonde arguing with each other. By the way, since *Silmeria* is a prequel to *Lenneth*, fans will notices references ranging from the obvious (Odin is still the Norse Allfather) to the subtle (Alicia is the princess of a land that's just a bunch of dust and tumbleweeds by the time *Lenneth* starts). Finally, *Lenneth* fans can finally see what the heck Silmeria's story is, since she gets name-dropped a whole lot.

WHY THIS INSTEAD OF FF?

Because you loved the first game and want to help its sequel last beyond a limited print run that'll result in future eBay bids of hundreds of dollars. Because you want to play the one Squenix RPG with an even weirder and crazier battle system than *FFXII*. Because you love playing as a schizophrenic Viking blonde.



NO MORE MONEY

Instead of picking up gold pieces and spending them at a shop with a happy little merchant, you'll be acquiring essence, which can be used at shrines to acquire new pieces of armor and weapons. Getting rid of the gold should be good for lessening the chance of random in-game leprechaun attacks.

PUB. Sony Online DEV. Sony Online RELEASE November PLATFORM PS3

UNTOLD LEGENDS: DARK KINGDOM

GOT A LIGHT?

HOW DO I FIGHT?

Like a man, of course (or a woman, if you decide to play as the scout). Only three classes will be available in the retail game, because the development team wants to focus on making each of them different. As you might expect, the big, hulking warrior (formerly known as Box Guy) is the tank, the buxom scout is the speedy, quick attacker, and the (as-yet-unseen) mage will be, well, magical.

This *Untold Legends* goes beyond the traditional X-button-mash—combat will be based on combinations of the light attack (Square) and heavy attack (X). Each character will earn more combos along the way (more than a dozen each), and these attacks will be varied to help the protagonist deal with the different types of combat presented by enemies.

Of course, if all of that sounds like it'll take too much thinking, you'll probably be able to make your way through with some hearty button mashing as well. But be careful—you won't be able to carry loads of health and mana potions. Instead, you'll be absorbing orbs of health and mana that enemies drop as they're killed. Recharge fountains will also be scattered throughout the levels.

WHY AM I FIGHTING?

You're fighting because evil rulers are again trying to vanquish the poor, innocent denizens of this land of tales not being told. In this case, the evil king who's trying to take over the land thrives off the pain of people, so he corrals them all into prisonlike areas to make them miserable and increase his power (kind of like Tommy B. does to the *OPM* staff). At the very least, you want to help people out of their weird little pain pens. It won't be all combat, though—this time, little puzzles are scattered throughout the game; you'll have to solve them to get to the next level.

WHY THIS INSTEAD OF FF?

Sometimes you don't really want to think too much—you just want to beat the crap out of anyone who gets in your way. At a time like that, *Dark Kingdom* fits the bill nicely. Plus, it's hacking and slashing for your shiny new PS3. So if you hate menus, this is for you!

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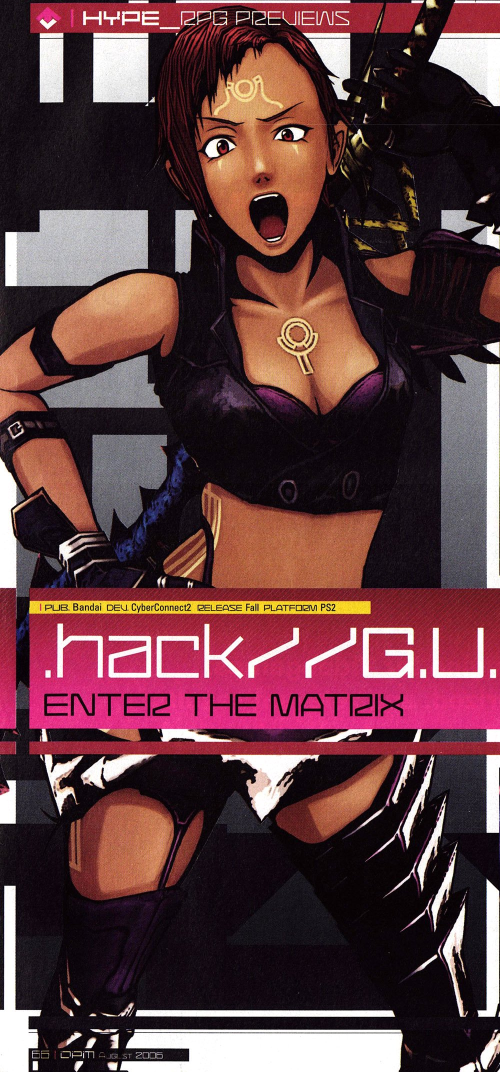


486
486
破裏剣舞

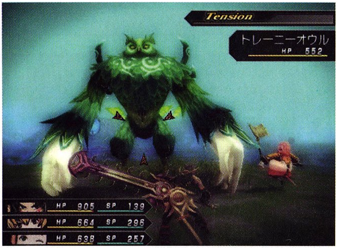
Strike
4
hits!!
ゼブラ
HP 384
R1
HP 571 SP 108
HP 656 SP 119
HP 441 SP 177

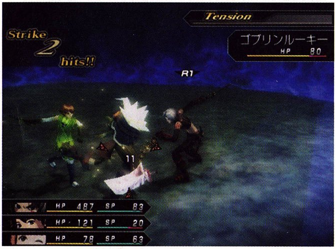
PUB. Bandai DEV. CyberConnect2 RELEASE Fall PLATFORM PS2

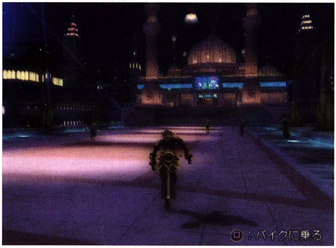
.hack//G.U.

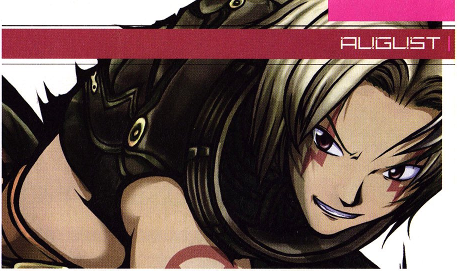
ENTER THE MATRIX

Tension
大火
HP 969 SP 145
Tension
R1
HP 682 SP 131
HP 0 SP 0
HP 680 SP 117









HOW DO I FIGHT?

Those unfamiliar with the first *.hack* series may not realize that the games are actually set inside of a game. So, instead of real-life combat, you'll be doing, uh, combat inside a game.

This game inside the game is known as *The World*, and it's been rebuilt since it was destroyed at the end of the last series. Fans of the original *.hack* will notice quite a few differences, such as a new main character (Haseo) and the tweaks done to combat. To begin with, the action flows better during combat. You'll still use menus to access spells or items, but the overall effect is much more spontaneous. Attack choices (which are tied to weapons—more about that in a bit) are mapped to the four face buttons, so all attacks will be on the fly. Enemy targeting is now automatic, so whichever bad guy is nearest gets your wrath—though you can use the D-pad to change targets.

Available attacks are dependent on the equipped weapon and its upgrades. All armor, weapons, and accessories can now be customized with ability items—you might, say, add poison to a weapon—and the ability items can be added or removed as desired. Equipment is also now associated by level, so you won't be able to use certain items until you're at the same level or higher.

One of the new additions to the dungeons is the PK-versus-PC battles—that's player killer and player character, respectively. If you see a circle of light and hear the sounds of someone getting smacked around, it means that you can intervene and help the PC fend off the PK. If you help successfully, the PC may reward you. There are also PVP arenas in this version of *The World*, which are good places for Haseo to learn new attacks; earning victories in the arena is another good way to pick up rewards.

> THE IMMERSION HAS BEEN AMPED UP, WITH MESSAGE BOARDS AND EVEN TV...

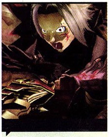
WHY AM I FIGHTING?

Haseo, who was attacked by a player killer, has now dedicated himself to eliminating all the other PKs in *The World*. This earns the ire of the best of all PKs (we like to think that maybe he's a ninja), so it becomes a battle between Haseo and the über-PK to see who can beat whom first.

One of the trademark characteristics of the original *.hack* series was that it made you feel like you were in an MMO even though the games were all single-player affairs. The immersion factor has been amped up even more this time, with interactive boards, news clips, messaging with other characters, and even a TV show—all of which help keep you in touch with the status of things in *The World* and make you feel like you're playing with friends instead of by your lonesome.

WHY THIS INSTEAD OF FF?

Well, for one, you'll probably get to play all three titles of the upcoming trilogy before a next-gen *FF* hits store shelves. And there'll be a lot more game than last time around—the developers estimate that every release in this new series will have as much playing time as the original four games of the *.hack* series combined.



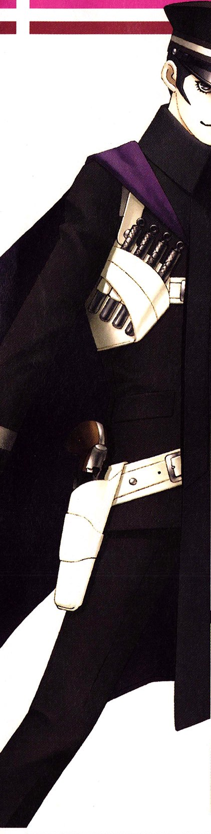
IS THAT A ROCKET IN YOUR POCKET?

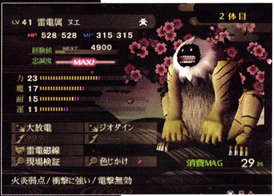
To help speed his way around the sprawling world, Haseo has a motorcycle always at the ready. Just click a button and he's on it, zooming around the environment; another click, and it's back in his inventory till the next time it's needed.

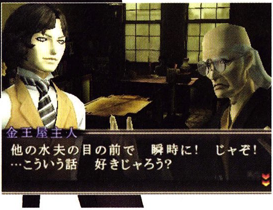
PUB. Atlus DEV. Atlus RELEASE Winter PLATFORM PS2

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DEVIL SUMMONER

THE DEVIL IS A LOSER, AND HE'S MY...







金王屋主人
他の水夫の目の前で　瞬時に！　じゃぞ！
…こういう話　好きじゃろう?

HOW DO I FIGHT?

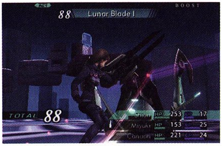
Ha! You think we're going to do that thing where we mention the previous games and say something along the lines of "more where that came from!" or "like that, but better!" Well, here's where things change, because this installment of the *MegaTen* franchise goes in a whole new direction for combat. For one thing, it's in real time! You can freely move Raidou (the main character) around the battle area—hitting Square will result in a sword swing, while hitting Triangle nets a gunshot. While it sounds like a supersimple action-RPG combat system, there's a bit of strategy in that you can summon demons; let's say you summoned a demon that uses fire, and your target is weak against fire—smart tactical choices like that result in faster enemy slaying. So the past element of learning the specific weaknesses of your foes is still quite present, even when the rest of combat has gone all crazy and actiony.

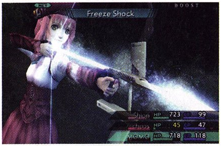
WHY AM I FIGHTING?

Because you're Raidou Kuzunoha, spirit detective! OK, that's not your official title, but Raidou is a private investigator in Taisho Period (1912-1926) Japan. Raidou zips around town solving paranormal mysteries; this portion of the gameplay is quite similar to old-school PC-style adventure games like *Grim Fandango* or *Gabriel Knight*. Except for the whole demon-summoning and action-RPG combat additions.

WHY THIS INSTEAD OF FF?

As different and unique as *FF* is, sometimes a stylish adventure game with demonic combat and early-20th-century Japanese threads is what you need.





PUB. Namco Bandai **DEV.** Monolith Soft
RELEASE Fall **PLATFORM** PS2

XENOSAGA EPISODE III: ALSO SPRACH ZARATHUSTRA

VICTORY CHANT: "I AM DYNAMITE"

HOW DO I FIGHT?

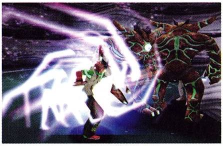
Take the better parts of *Xenosaga Episodes I* and *II*, and voilà, you have the combat system for this latest episode. For example, no need to worry about specific zones to attack, and both things like Tech attacks and the Boost Gauge have returned for the better. Also, you can purchase traps and use them in specific battles. Finally, individual skills are back, so characters actually feel unique and not as generic as they did in *Episode II*.

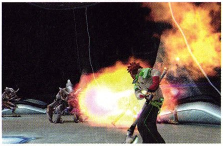
WHY AM I FIGHTING?

Whether or not you played the previous two episodes, you have a handy encyclopedia and video summary that compresses the previous two games into a digestible chunk of exposition. Also, *Xenosaga* was originally set for six episodes, but now it's three, so you should probably queue up "The Final Countdown" as you play this. Storywise, it takes place a year after *Episode II*, and focuses on Shion (who has quit Vector because she thinks it's involved with the weird and evil Gnosis) and her fight against Vector. Oh, and as cool as KOS-MOS, our favorite female android superweapon, is, Vector has made an even more powerful android called T-Elos, and her rivalry with KOS-MOS is a significant part of the story.

WHY THIS INSTEAD OF FF?

Well, maybe you want a heady dose of anime-style philosophy mixed with heavy robotics. Or perhaps you have plunked down many, many hours of previous *Xenosaga* games, and it'd be a real shame to stop just as they're wrapping up the whole saga.





PUB. Sega **DEV.** Sonic Team **RELEASE** Fall
PLATFORM PS2

PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

GO TEAM SONIC!

HOW DO I FIGHT?

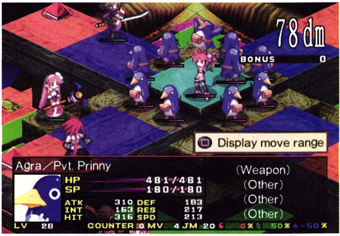
Think of this like real life, where you get your posse of five other pals/chums/buddies, roll up on some baddies, and fight away. Oh, and not only do you have trusty heavy and light attacks, but you also have a choice between ranged and melee weaponry. That's useful for times when you need to clip some flying fool's wings from afar before running up and smacking him with your big laser sword. As mentioned earlier, you can have a posse of either AI-controlled (for single-player) or real compadres.

WHY AM I FIGHTING?

Well, if you're playing the offline single-player mode, there's a whole epic story about a kid named Ethan who zips around the galaxy and does all sorts of, er, galactic things. But once you finish that stuff, the real game (which takes place years and years after Ethan's adventure, to the point where there is a statue honoring him) is online, where you zip around the wild world of the Internet with other players. One way to show how awesome you are is to use items that you snag in quests as decorations for your apartment, which everyone sees when they join your game.

WHY THIS INSTEAD OF FF?

Because you want a game that goes beyond the "You finished the main quest—eat a cookie with joy!" feeling that you get with a single-player game. Because you want a game where you and your pals can roll up on a space dragon and beat the ever-living Internet out of it.



ATTACKS 3
TOTAL DAMAGE 47

ATTACKS 4
TOTAL DAMAGE 235

PUB. NIS America **DEV.** Nippon Ichi **RELEASE** August **PLATFORM** PS2

DISGAEA 2: CURSED MEMORIES

THE BEST PENGUIN IS A WEAPONIZED PENGUIN

HOW DO I FIGHT?

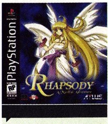
Remember the previous *Disgaea*? How you were looking down on an isometric map, and then engaged in strategic, turn-based combat? Add in goofy twists like picking up and throwing people (either units in your party or enemies), and you have the same basic foundation. Now add in the geo panels, which are spots on the landscape that offer tactical advantages (extra attacks, bonus experience, etc.) to whoever triggers them. On top of that, you'll also be visiting the Dark Court during battle—to stand trial for crimes committed during combat. You get *Disgaea*'s solid turn-based fighting plus even wackier hijinks.

WHY AM I FIGHTING?

You play Adell, the last human in the world. (Another character remarks, "You're only human because you're the main character!") Adell wants to take out the Overlord Zenon, and there are lots of strategic battles to contend with along the way.

WHY THIS INSTEAD OF FF?

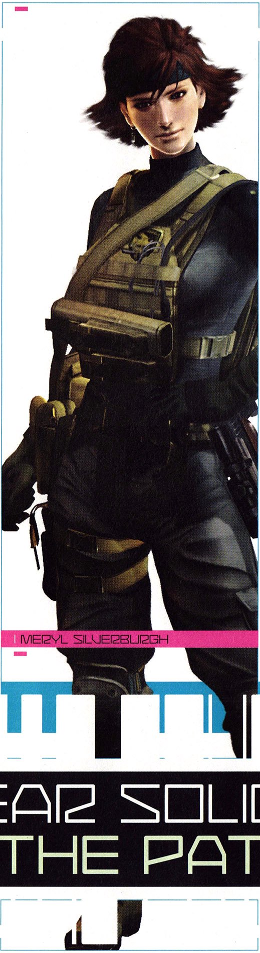
Because you're not looking for an adventure, but for a war. Because you like to sit and ponder your moves in chess/backgammon/Stratego. Because not only do you love some strategy in your roleplaying, but you also want some truly oddball stuff (penguins as weapons!) in your role-playing "strategery."



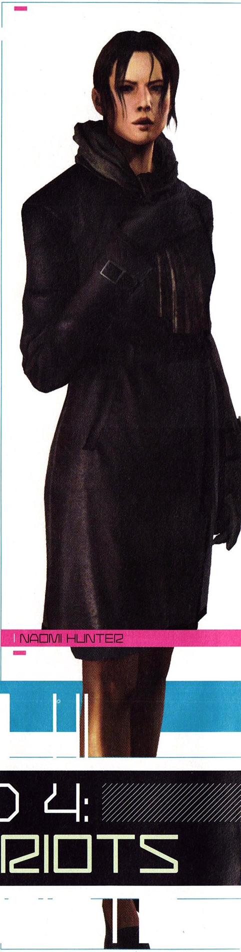
QUIRKY NIS

Nippon Ichi is the master of creating weird little strategy RPGs. Besides the *Disgaea* series, there's also *La Pucelle: Tactics* (filled with angels and demons), *Rhapsody: A Musical Adventure* (its quirkiness is self-explanatory) and *Phantom Brave*, where you imbue inanimate objects with souls.

LIQUID OCELOT



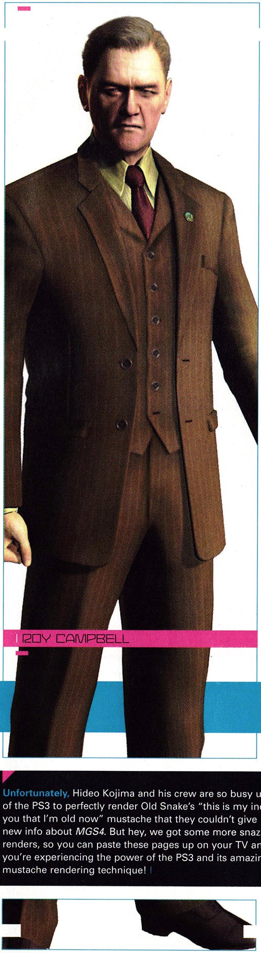
MERYL SILVERBURGH



NAOMI HUNTER

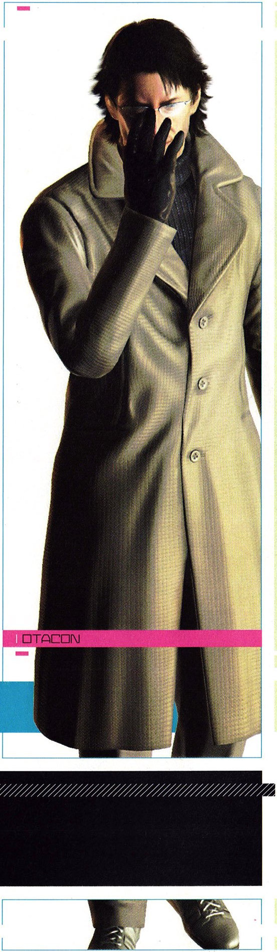
Pub. Konami **Dev.** Kojima Productions **Release** 2007

METAL GEAR SOLID 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS



ROY CAMPBELL

RAIDEN



OTACON

Unfortunately, Hideo Kojima and his crew are so busy using the power of the PS3 to perfectly render Old Snake's "this is my indication to you that I'm old now" mustache that they couldn't give us any juicy new info about *MGS4*. But hey, we got some more snazzy character renders, so you can paste these pages up on your TV and pretend that you're experiencing the power of the PS3 and its amazing old-man-mustache rendering technique!

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SUNSHINE
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REVIEWS

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, ONE GAME AT A TIME

74

GTA: LIBERTY CITY STORIES

GOOD AND CHEAP

PS2
OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH

80

VALKYRIE PROFILE: LENNETH

A PS1 CLASSIC

PSP
OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH

RATING KEY
No more blargs, octagons, or whatever you've called them—now we're sticking with straight-up numbers. And any game that receives five of 'em is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 2.5 is merely mediocre. And a 0.5? Well...at least they're fun to rip apart.

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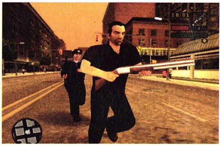
PS2
OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH

HEPBURN HEIGHTS



PUB. Rockstar **DEV.** Rockstar Leeds **ESRB** M **MSRP** $19.99

GRAND THEFT AUTO: LIBERTY CITY STORIES

THE BEST VALUE PS2 GAME THIS YEAR

First things first: Let's get the obvious question out of the way. Why would you want to play this version of *Grand Theft Auto: Liberty City Stories* if you've already played the PSP game? Well, to be completely honest, you *wouldn't*. More than 900,000 people have bought the handheld version for $49.99 since it was released last October, which means there's a good chance that many of you already know what it has to offer. That said, given the popularity of the franchise, there are doubtless millions who have yet to experience Toni Cipriani's adventures and are now being given the perfect excuse to do so, thanks to the crazy-cheap $20 price point.

When we reviewed *Liberty City Stories* last year, we gave it a healthy score of 4.5 and summarized it all up with these comments: "Despite some fundamental problems that will have you seething with anger at fairly regular intervals, it's still an admirable achievement. Whereas so many other publishers have been pushing watered-down, feeble excuses for PSP versions of their megafranchises, this should be applauded as being a full-on sequel, and it's certainly comparable to *GTA3*."

So does the PS2 version address any of these problems? Well, kinda. Is it still as worthy of praise despite its not being a handheld game? Absolutely, yes. One of the reasons we were so impressed previously was that it was a full-on *GTA* game, with extra multiplayer features, all stuffed into the PSP. Obviously, it's a different consideration for the PS2, but it's still a great piece of fan service, despite the fact that it's missing those multiplayer modes.

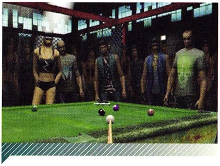
Chief among the complaints leveled at the PSP version was the control system. Hindered further by the analog nub and lack of shoulder buttons of the system, *LCS* suffered from the absolute worst case of what many see as the curse of the franchise. Running around on foot was a complete nightmare at times, and some of the more brutal missions were challenging because you were forced to fight the controls rather than the challenge at hand. Although by no means perfect, the switch to DualShock means that these are now no more annoying than in *Vice City* or *GTA3*. Combat is fine as long as you can juggle the way it locks onto targets, and for the most part, it's perfectly manageable.

> THE FACT THAT IT'S ONLY $20 IS AN ENORMOUS CONSIDERATION.

Considering that this is a full-blown, 40-hour (or more) *GTA* experience, with all the personality and style we've come to expect from that, the fact that it's only $20 is an enormous consideration here. Yes, it's a port, and yes, the technology is showing its age, but it's a new story set in a familiar world, and it's as solid as the other games in the series. Right now, when PS2 pickings are pretty slim, this is particularly welcome. | *John Davison*

VERDICT Spectacularly good value, despite some of the same old problems.

SCORE 4.5 | 5



THE HUSTLE: DETROIT STREETS

WAKE ME WHEN IT'S OVER

| PUB. Activision DEV. Blade

ESRB T MSRP $19.99

You know, when I reviewed this game on the PSP, I considered it one of the worst games I'd played in a long time. Imagine my surprise, then, when I loaded up the PS2 version and discovered that, in rank defiance of all that is good and right with the world, it's actually *just as bad*—a development that would be amusing if it didn't make me want to hurt someone.

The game features the same throwaway story that has something to do with working your way up through a crime organization and traveling to...uh...other...zzzzzzz. Hmm? Oh, sorry. It's just that I couldn't possibly care less. We are, after all, talking about the story for a *pool game*.

As with the PSP version, the fundamental gameplay is reasonably solid. There are a lot of different game types, from 3-ball to snooker (the game even features the inexplicable ability to play random casino games on the side), and it's also fairly easy to do well thanks to the helpful-but-not-perfect ball guide.

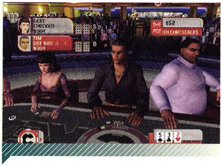
And, as with the PSP version, everything else about the game well and truly sucks. The clunky interface and oddly frequent load times make for frustrations from the moment the game boots up, and the laughably bad graphics and animation make me wonder if they were changed from the PSP version at all. (That's not hyperbole; I'm genuinely curious.) The story mode seems to take forever to progress, and even then it's still the...same...zzzzzz. Damn, sorry.

This version does include online play—but, brother, good luck finding someone to play with. Apparently, everyone else in the world decided that 20 bucks is too much to pay for this bargain-basement experience.

So, like the PSP version, it's solid pool gameplay buried under a mound of crap. Unlike the PSP version, however, there are other pool games available for this system. Go buy one of those. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT The "budget" price of $20 is about $15 too much.

SCORE 1|5



STACKED WITH DANIEL NEGREANU

PAY THAT MAN HIS MONEY

| PUB. Myelin Media DEV. 5000ft

ESRB T MSRP $29.99

We're definitely inching toward respectability with poker games lately. Each of the most recent crop of games seems to take a step forward in at least one area...though usually at the cost of a half-step back in another.

Stacked is a particularly powerful example of this. The most impressive thing about the game is the opponent AI. The developers really nailed the right balance of aggression and timidity—so much so that this is the first game where I've gotten the feeling I can actually read my opponents' hands simply by the way they bet.

It's clear the devs put a great deal of time into getting the competition just right. And that's sort of the problem. It seems like so much effort was expended to cement the fundamental gameplay that the game suffers pretty seriously in other areas. For example, take the game selection: You've got single-table tournament, multitable tournament, and cash versions of no-limit Texas Hold 'Em, limit Texas Hold 'Em, and...er, that's it.

There are a couple of extras: The "Stacked Poker School" features a series of brief video tutorials from Negreanu himself, which are packed with tidbits of info in spite of being fairly shallow; they'll give you lots to think about, but you'll want to do some deeper reading to really understand most of it. And an online mode adds to the replay value, although I still have to say that if you're buying a poker game to play online, you might want to consider signing up for a play-money account at any of the dozens of free poker sites on the Internet.

But when it comes right down to it, this game is about a realistic Texas Hold 'Em experience against the computer, and not much else. Newcomers might find more of value in the *World Poker Tour* games on either the PS2 or the PSP. | *Joe Rybicki*

GOOD HABITS

Though the "Ask Daniel" feature of *Stacked* is hilariously broken, the game does a fine job of encouraging habits that will serve players well in real-life games. For example, by default you only see your cards when they're first dealt; if you want to see them again, you have to manually check your hand, which gives your opponents information about what you're holding.

ROYAL FLUSH A really impressive AI routine makes this the most realistic poker
PAIR It's all Texas Hold 'Em, all the time, and a bit light on other features.

SCORE 3.5|5

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA ANTHOLOGY

HOW IT SHOULD BE DONE

| PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom

ESRB T MSRP $29.99

Is there anything more irritating in the world than playing a *Street Fighter* game that has loading time in between matches? No, there isn't, and that's why *Street Fighter Anniversary Collection* was such a disaster. It's also why *Street Fighter Alpha Anthology* serves as a perfect example of how a collection of this sort should be done—arcade-perfect action without any loading time, save for the few seconds after you select the game you want to play.

And there are quite a few different games to choose from. Not only are there the regular versions of all three *Street Fighter Alpha* games, but you'll also find *Street Fighter Alpha 2 Gold* and *Gem Fighter*, a fighting game based on the characters featured in Capcom's awesome *Tetris*-style clone, *Puzzle Fighter*—it's worth buying the collection for *Gem Fighter* alone.

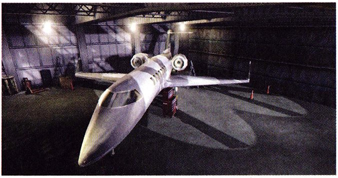
With the exception of maybe the original *Alpha*, which doesn't hold up particularly well, all of these games are arcade perfect in practically every way. Even the shadows in the original *Alpha* are blue, which should be a welcome gift for those of you who may have previously purchased and played the Saturn version of *Alpha* (ha-ha, *Street Fighter* inside joke...ha...ha...).

There's even more secret stuff beyond the available games. We won't spoil anything, but you can actually play new versions of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* and other games in the collection, which is the sort of stuff that the *Street Fighter* hardcore will go absolutely bonkers for. And if you bought a Game Genie to play as the bosses in *Street Fighter II* for the SNES, then you'll probably appreciate these extra features more than anyone else—yeah, it's that hardcore.

Overall, *Street Fighter Alpha Anthology* is just an all-around great collection, and fighting fans should be thrilled that Capcom was willing to give these great fighting games the treatment that they deserve. Hooray! | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Excellent ports, lots of hardcore extra stuff
CONS A little more not-so-hardcore extra stuff for the casual fans would've been great

SCORE 4|5



PUB. 2KGames DEV. The Collective ESRB T MSRP $39.99

THE DA VINCI CODE

MORE LIKE THE DA VINCI LOAD OF PUZZLES

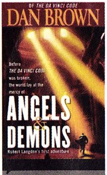
You've heard it all before. Movies. Licenses. Lameness. Sadly, the videogame incarnation of the popular piece of fiction (yes, it's fiction!) and now the equally popular movie doesn't mess too much with that familiar recipe. But what it lacks in innovative gameplay or polish it makes up for in effort. At the very least, *The Da Vinci Code* tries to go well beyond what was presented in both the book and the movie—even at the cost of staying totally true to Dan Brown's "original" story.

As a result, you get to dive even deeper into the world that surrounds *The Da Vinci Code*, which basically means that you just get more information on various artifacts, cults, religion, and other sorts of semiconspiratorial things. The puzzles go far beyond all those of the book/movie, pushing your sleuthing abilities to the extreme.

It's just so unfortunate that the execution of everything else in the game is so sloppy. Fighting mechanics—as out of place as they are—are totally basic, involving simple *DDR*-style button pressing and some clunky grappling controls. The stealth is way too easy, and the exploration is too open-ended. There are moments where you've seemingly exhausted every option, only to find that you missed a small piece of evidence that could've only been found if you literally searched the room inch by inch. And that's just not very much fun. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

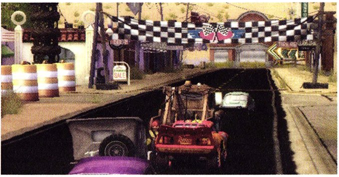
PROS Interesting puzzles and historical information
CONS Everything outside of the puzzles is pretty sloppy

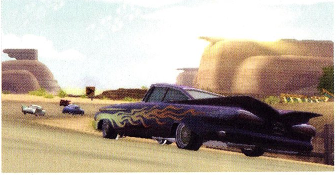
SCORE 2.5 | 5


OF THE DA VINCI CODE
DAN BROWN
Before THE DA VINCI CODE was broken, the world lay at the mercy of
ANGELS & DEMONS
Robert Langdon's first adventure

SOME READING

Hey, remember books? Well, if you're a *Da Vinci Code* fanatic, you should also take a look at Dan Brown's other book, *Angels & Demons*, which is a prequel of sorts to *The Da Vinci Code*. Or just go read the Bible and draw your own conclusions.





PUB. THQ DEV. Rainbow Studios ESRB E MSRP $39.99

CARS

LIFE IS A HIGHWAY

I have to admit that THQ has surprised me with *Cars*. What could've been a straight-up racing-game cash-in on Pixar's latest CG-animated film has turned out to be a fairly deep kids' game with a nice collection of options, game modes, and characters to play with.

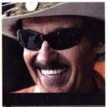
Rather than try to re-create the movie's plot, *Cars* tells a new story that takes place in Radiator Springs. As Lightning McQueen, you explore this stretch of Route 66 while taking on challenges—mostly races—set forth by its residents. The races don't get stale, thanks to superb control, pretty graphics, and a nice assortment of tracks. You can road race through town as you go up against some of the movie's main characters. And as a bit of a nod to NASCAR dads everywhere, you can also enter a handful of Piston Cup events on tracks modeled on real-world NASCAR venues like Homestead-Miami Speedway.

It's not all about racing, though—unlockable characters and minigames abound. Hassle Mack on the highway as Wingo, Snot Rod, DJ, or Boost; chase down speed demons as Sheriff; or go tractor-tipping with Mater in a stealth-based minigame. It's a great way to break up the action and earn points in order to buy unlockables.

Since it's aimed at the kiddies, *Cars* doesn't rival the likes of *Burnout*, but it does manage to be engaging for young and old without being crass or violent—no mean feat for a kids' game. | *Greg Sewart*

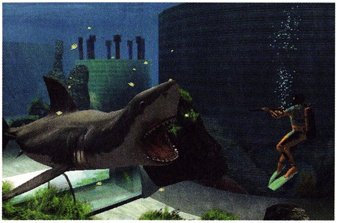
VERDICT A surprisingly polished movie-based game that's fun for young and old players alike.

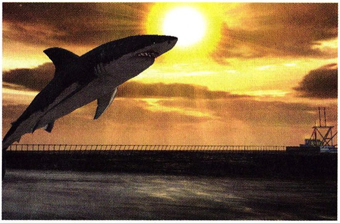
SCORE 4 | 5



NASCAR NODS

NASCAR dads will be happy to know that a few of the real-world driver-based characters are available for play here, too. The King and Darrell Cartrip (voiced by Richard Petty and Darrell Waltrip, respectively) both appear in this game. Sorry, no sign of Dale Earnhardt Jr.'s character.





PUB. Majesco DEV. Appaloosa ESRB M MSRP $29.99

JAWS UNLEASHED

JUST WHEN YOU THOUGHT IT WAS SAFE TO GO BACK IN THE WATER...

As a rule, most gamers know not to expect too much from movie-licensed games. *Jaws Unleashed* ended up being an exception to that rule, though, at least at the *OPM* office: The thought of swimming around as a shark and indiscriminately chomping anyone who got in the way seemed awesome, and it looked like it had the potential to be one of those beautifully tacky games, kind of like *Jaws 3-D* is a fantastically awful movie.

And there are things about *Unleashed* that *are* awesome. In the first level, the silliness of grabbing a scientist and swiping his body so his key card will open a gate is awesomely B-movie funny, as is the boss battle with the water park's resident killer whale. Unfortunately, once you get out in the ocean (which is touted as being a *GTA*-like open world, except it's *NOT*), things become more annoyingly pedestrian. Here you're mostly targeting divers and boats; after a while, it gets repetitious.

The real problem lies in the controls. Jaws has the response time of an aircraft carrier, and his steering accuracy isn't that much better. Your primary attacks are head-butts and tail swipes, but Jaws can't back up, so when you're repeatedly trying to bash the same spot, it becomes a boring (and painful, if you're trying to simultaneously avoid attackers) exercise in trial and error, as you swing around in a not-very-tight circle to bring yourself back to the same spot. Grabbing things with your mouth and then aiming and throwing are really awkward and end up being a tedious process of trial and error.

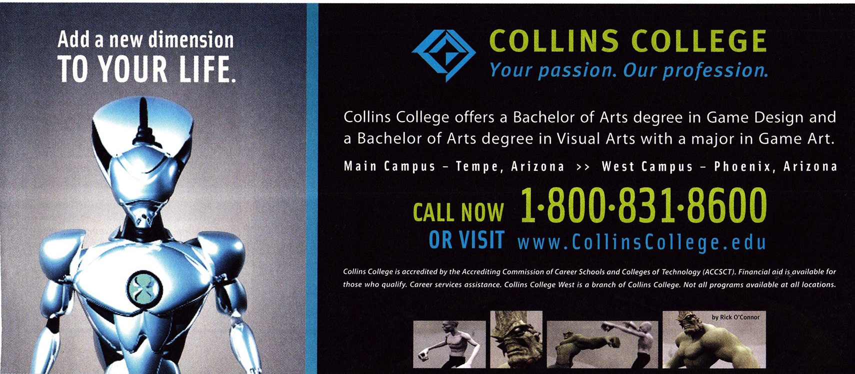
Also annoying are the attacks. I'm cool with defending myself from danger, but when a few bites from a dolphin—a freaking dolphin!—put me in jeopardy of going belly-up, humiliation abounds. It's as bad as getting killed by a deer in *Ultima Online*! And it's impossible to dodge attacks from above the water, where near-perfect sharpshooters are aiming and shooting down at you.

I wanted to love *Jaws*. I wanted to give myself over to the delicious silliness and awesomeness that should have been. But instead of swimming happily through a sea of gore, I found myself wishing Jaws could add me to the body count. Boo. | *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT Defending myself from a shark attack would be more entertaining.

SCORE 1.5 | 5

MMMMM, CAKE! *Jaws* helped perpetuate the perception of sharks as crazy, bloodthirsty creatures, but the reality is that you are 15 times more likely to be struck by lightning than to be bitten by a shark. Unless you smell of delicious chocolate cake—then you're toast no matter what.



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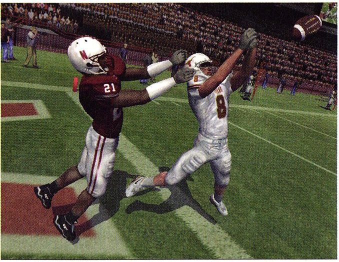
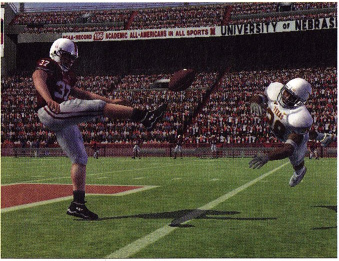
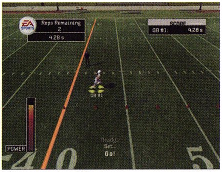
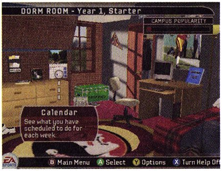
by Rick O'Connor








DORM ROOM - Year 1, Starter
CAMPUS POPULARITY
Calendar
See what you have scheduled to do for each week.
B Main Menu
A Select
Y Options
X Turn Help Of

Campus Legend replaces last year's Race for the Heisman and allows you to now gain recognition while playing a position other than quarterback or running back. You choose to divide your nonfootball time between studying and partying in hope of becoming the guy everyone likes around campus. Welcome to the day and age of sports games needing single-player story modes.

PUB. EA Sports **DEV.** EA Tiburon **ESRB** E **MSRP** $49.99

NCAA FOOTBALL 07

MORE FUN THAN BEER BONGS ON A FOOTBALL SATURDAY

I'm the Boise State Broncos—not at home on the blue Smurf Turf, but on the road in South Bend, IN. I'm down 12 to Notre Dame and there are 49 seconds remaining. With no time-outs left, I can't stop the clock. I score on the next play and boot the PAT.

Now, in *NCAA Football* games of old, that's where the game would end, with me losing by five. I can't tell you how many games I've played over the years where I needed two scores late and would get the first, only to be stymied by the fact that onside kicks in this game didn't work. But they do now. The new analog kicking mechanic allows me to successfully onside kick and recover the ball. Now, I'd just better not score too soon, because Fighting Irish QB Brady Quinn can't be stopped.

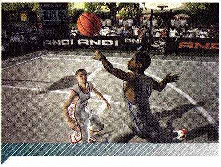
Analog kicking is just one of the many gameplay additions that fuel my addiction to this game. The quarterback moves way better than in previous games—he can take off and run without having to pull the ball down, making rolling out and throwing on the run more fluid. New options at the line on both sides of the ball enhance the realism. Can you guess the count? Choose to jump the snap. If you guess right, the play goes nowhere, and your Momentum Meter rises. A new feature, the Momentum Meter really ups the unpredictability factor: String together several good plays and your strength rises, but just one big play can completely swing the momentum back the other way.

Other great additions: You can now slide your line for more protection if the defense has stacked one side, and there are now direct hot routes for all 11 defensive players. In dynasty mode, play the spring game and decide your impact players for the next season. And, to top it all off, ESPN is newly united with the franchise this year, and you can see the integration all over the game.

NCAA easily gets my nod for the best sports game to hit the PS2 so far this year. And oh, yeah—in case you were wondering, Boise State scored on a Jared Zabransky scramble with three seconds remaining for the win. Go Broncos! | *Patrick Mauro*

TOUCHDOWN Multiple variations of every conceivable formation, plus trick plays.
FUMBLE The new Impact Camera slows down and zooms in on big plays. It's disruptive and annoying—and totally unrealistic.

SCORE 4.5|5



AND 1 STREETBALL

AND...IT'S TIME TO TAKE IT BACK TO THE STORE

PUB. Ubisoft **DEV.** Black Ops Entertainment
ESRB E10+ **MSRP** $39.99

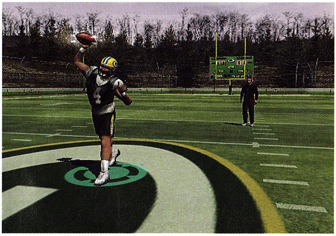
In a genre cramped with games, products like *AND 1 Streetball* really don't have a place. Not because the game's a horrible train wreck or anything, but because it's the very definition of an average—and in some cases, slightly subaverage—representation of street basketball that's been done a million times over by other companies. And other companies and other games—some of which were developed over five years ago—have done it better.

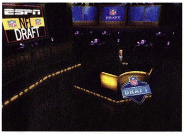
Since ankle-breaking moves are such an important part of the offense-heavy sport known as streetball, let's start there. You have plenty of moves at your disposal—and, indeed, they're cool as their own stand-alone animations—but they're not really incorporated into the game that well. While it's cool that you can do combinations with ball-handling moves, it feels like a tacked-on novelty. Your player goes into a scripted animation sequence over which you have absolutely no control (and sometimes these sequences are pretty long), and often the moves don't really do much in the way of ankle-breaking. You can practically play off the ball handler, sit in the key, and wait for a guy to come down and block his shot or dunk. Of course, your opponent can then charge up a meter to do a "superdunk" that earns more points than the typical basket, but the player holding the ball can do that regardless. On top of that, the moves are mapped to the right analog stick, which is helpful, but the directions simply represent button presses, so they don't give full control over ball movement.

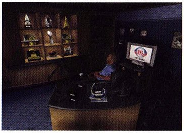
The rest of the game is just as standard. You have the typical tour and exhibition modes, as well as some customization options—including the ability to integrate your face into the game via EyeToy. But for a game this average, these extras do little to make it more enticing. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

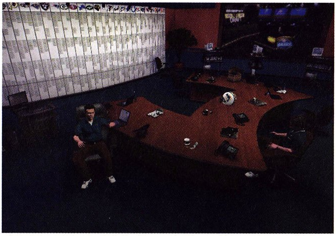
PROS None, really—just average b-ball.
CONS Average b-ball means it's not good streetball.

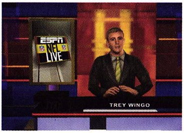
SCORE 2.5|5











PUB. EA Sports DEV. EA Sports ESRB E MSRP $39.99

NFL HEAD COACH

MORE MEETINGS?! I HATE MEETINGS!

Aren't videogames supposed to help us forget our troubles and transport us to a different, better place—in other words, help us escape reality?

The irony of *NFL Head Coach* is that it doesn't do that. It sort of does the opposite—in fact, it might do too good a job of simulating a job few will ever have.

I know this sounds like an odd criticism. It's true that *NFL Head Coach* is an incredibly in-depth simulation of every single, down-to-the-nitty-gritty thing an NFL coach does on a day-to-day basis. This includes being hired in the first place (there's an interview process), staffing, scouting, negotiating with players, setting the team roster, determining plays, and keeping the front office and fans happy.

Make no mistake: This is a high-pressure situation and, frankly, *NFL Head Coach* has given me a greater appreciation for what these guys go through. But, good god, did they have to simulate boredom? If you play *NFL Head Coach* on a daily time frame, you are looking at long days answering e-mail, making deals, talking to your staff, talking to agents, futzing around with the salary cap, and meeting with your bosses. Thank god you can jump ahead and let the game simulate all that happens in between. I began my game on "daily," but changed when my calendar said "26 days to restricted free agency"—I mean, let's get on with it already!

And then there's the pressure from "The Man": the team owner. He sets goals for the year and provides feedback, which is great. But if you don't come through, you'll get a "We need to talk" from him. In one such case, after I had decided to simulate my way through the draft, he was all over my arse: "We picked up some good players, but I'm disappointed you didn't fill all the positions we identified before the draft," and "Where's my star QB you were supposed to draft?" Ouch.

Aye, and there's the rub. I felt bad because I disappointed my boss. And then I started thinking, "Where's this guy get off?" And then I realized he was right—I'd have to try harder to make things work. Just like in real life.

The depth to which *NFL Head Coach* goes to simulate its world is impressive. Pigskin fanatics will love it, but if I want stress and boredom, I think I'll stick with my day job. | *Tom Byron*

SUPER BOWL CHAMPS Incredibly detailed simulation of what it's like to be a pro-football coach.
LAST PLACE But maybe too detailed: Boredom can set in if you're not careful.

SCORE 3|5

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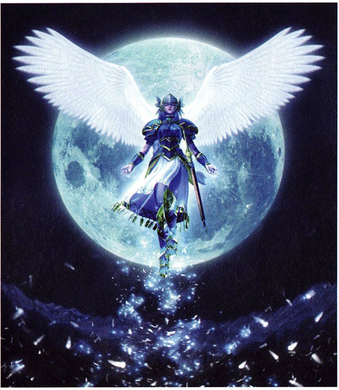
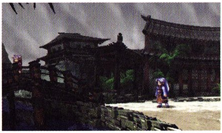
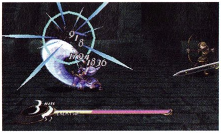






PUB. Square Enix **DEV.** Tri-Ace **ESRB** T **MSRP** $39.99

VALKYRIE PROFILE: LENNETH

BY ODIN'S BEARD!

One thing we're fond of saying about the PSP is that it needs a damn good role-playing game to complete its library. Sure, there have been some action-RPGs and a few regular RPGs from smaller companies, but none of the big boys like Squenix or even Konami have put a *real* RPG on the PSP. So *Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth* is Squenix meeting us halfway: It's not an *FF* title for the PSP, but it *is* a port of one of the better and rarer games in the company's history.

If you missed the *VP* train back in 2000, then you happened to miss one of Enix's underprinted gems—back when Square and Enix were still separate companies. Sure, the game was a totally weird hybrid of 2D platforming and action-RPGing, but that weird hybrid was both its strength (because it was a lot of fun) and its weakness (as it appealed to a very niche audience at the time).

Said *VP* fans enjoy the crazy story of a Valkyrie (Lenneth) sent by Odin to scour the land for warriors to take to Valhalla in preparation for Ragnarok (the Norse version of the Apocalypse). They don't mind having her fly around the overworld in 3D and having her descend into a 2D town or two. After getting some story stuff out of the way, Lenneth and her gang make their way into a 2D dungeon, where our Valkyrie heroine runs and jumps past simple puzzles, occasionally creates crystals that serve as makeshift platforms for jumps, and fights off enemies.

For combat, you control each character with a corresponding fact button (other actions are performed by pressing Select during combat to bring up a menu). The challenge is to string together combo attacks by having the right characters attack at the right moments (RPGers who play fighting games have something of an edge here). Pulling off some sweet synchronized moves allows you the privilege of doing superspecial attacks (called "Purify Weak Souls") that fulfill the requisite "combat eye candy" part of battle. Suffice it to say there's no other RPG like *VP*—not even in the years since *VP*'s initial release.

Valkyrie Profile on the PS1 was an excellent and criminally underprinted game but, alas, its journey to the PSP is a bit marred. The 2D sprites and the backgrounds look fine, but the addition of new CG cutscenes is actually quite jarring and tends to take you out of the experience—the CG looks so different from the hand-drawn 2D look of the rest of the game. Also, despite its being a PS1 title, accessing the menu means sitting though three-second load times. That might seem inconsequential until you start adding up all the times you go to the menu for leveling and equipment and party options—then it gets a bit annoying.

Also, *Lenneth*, as good as it is, is *not* a game conducive to portable play. The introduction sequence still lasts freakin' 45 minutes before hitting a save point, and the rest of the save points are still scattered a bit too far apart for my tastes. Finally, despite the fact that *VP* now has a chance to gain a larger audience due to its PSP rerelease, you still need to play the crazy hard mode to get the full story.

If you already own the original PS1 game (either as a recent and expensive purchase from eBay or from being a faithful fan from back in the day), you actually have the superior version (i.e., no load times or slowdowns). But if you've always heard other RPG nerds gush endlessly about this game and don't feel like ponying up a c-note, this is a good way for you to see just what all the Nordic fuss is about. | *Thierry Nguyen*

> LENNETH, AS GOOD AS IT IS, IS NOT CONDUCIVE TO PORTABLE PLAY.

THOR A great and underappreciated RPG gets rereleased...
LOKI ...except it has load-time issues, and it's such a straightforward port that it forgot it was rereleased to a handheld, not a stationary, console.

SCORE 4|5

PSP
OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
GAME OF THE MONTH

VIKING DAYS

Hey, did you know that the weekdays are named after Norse gods? Consider this:

Monday = Mani's (god of the moon) Day
Tuesday = Tyr's (god of war) Day
Wednesday = Odin's (god of wisdom) Day
Thursday = Thor's (god of thunder) Day
Friday = Freya's (goddess of love) Day

Oh no! These pests are in my fields AGAIN!

NEOPETS PETPET ADVENTURES: THE WAND OF WISHING

RPG JUNIOR

| PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEA ESRB E MSRP $39.99

Neopets.com, a free website where kids can adopt virtual pets, start guilds, build stats, play flash games, and absorb advertising, hit 4 billion page views a month in May 2005—so it wasn't surprising when MTV snapped up the site and started spinning off products that actually cost money, starting with videogames.

The Wand of Wishing is a brand-new game, not a port of the earlier PS2 Neopets release, *The Darkest Faerie*. And unlike that title—an action-platformer—*TWOW* is pretty much a hack-n-slash RPG. The story does a good job of incorporating the elements of the Neopets' history and traditions, so fans of the website will be familiar with the basics. For example, all the character options are drawn from the assorted Neopet races, the types of stats are the same, and skills can be leveled up in arena-style combat similar to that in the games available on the website.

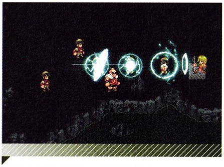
However, there are pitfalls as well. For example, instead of gaining experience points to level up, you have to pay for the privilege of facing off in the arena, which puts an annoying concentration on bashing open every crate that you come across so you can accumulate as much money as possible. Boss battles are often awkward, as the fighting areas are frequently so large that you end up crisscrossing back and forth multiple times just trying to find your opponent—marking an enemy blip on the corner map would've helped save time.

Worst, however, is the saving. As in *Blade Dancer*, another new PSP RPG, there's no save-anywhere option; instead, you're tied to checkpoints. While none of the checkpoints are all that far apart, it's irritating to go through a save process that takes approximately one minute every 10 minutes or so. And in a portable game that you may need to shut off at any point, it's ultra-annoying.

It's nice to have a G-rated entry available in the RPG genre to help young gamers learn the ropes, but a few improvements could've made this game a good deal better than it is. | *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT Could've been a good RPG intro for kids, but bad save and leveling systems cripple it.

SCORE 3|5



ASTONISHIA STORY

A STORY ABOUT BEING OUT 40 BUCKS

| PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Sonnori

ESRB E MSRP $39.99

The script occasionally manages to get localized in a way that is surreally funny, rather than embarrassingly bad. The animations of the dully designed characters and settings are bold and easy to follow on the PSP screen. And the characters are too shallow and thinly written to ever break out of character, so they stay right on. That's right—it's another PSP RPG!

Absurdly bad localization almost works as camouflage for the gameplay issues. It's nearly possible to not realize how little fun the actual game provides as you try to figure out what the dialogue was supposed to be. The ploy eventually fails, though, because there isn't any fun here. *Astonishia* isn't actually obscenely bad, where just playing it could cause long-term damage, but there's no reason a game with such cut-rate content costs full price.

The story revolves around a young, idealistic knight who gets swept up as an evil noble steals an important artifact and slays the knight's mentor in the process. The actual gameplay is just as imaginative—and it has the bonus of load times. Ten to 15 seconds of loading will accompany any new screen, especially the combat grid. Things like height, flanking, and distance are meaningless, so just apply the best power from your highest-level character to enemies until combat is done. It doesn't help that experience is hard to come by as the game railroads you into new areas—clever tactics don't exist to overcome the steep difficulty this creates.

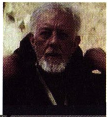
Astonishia is yet another case of a game being quickly thrown together (it's based on a 1994 PC title) and getting a high price tag slapped on it. The gameplay mechanics make sense, and it doesn't crash constantly, so it could be worse. But that doesn't excuse it for not being better, let alone aspiring to be merely good. | *Patrick Joynt*

VERDICT The title screen includes the phrase "...RPG games." That's the first warning of what a sloppy, wince-inducing piece this title is.

SCORE 1.5|5

HIT ME

Don't confuse *Blade Dancer* development house Hit Maker with the old Sega studio Hitmaker (of *Crazy Taxi* fame). While Hit Maker is also a Japanese company, the two aren't related beyond that fact.



ENOUGH IS ENOUGH!

If there's anything that fantasy and science fiction have taught us, it's that it's not safe to be a trusted and valiant mentor. They end up dead, and the mentored kid ends up with one arm, kissing his sister.

Lumo
26/540
Gozen 77
Lance 187
Tess 132

BLADE DANCER: LINEAGE OF LIGHT

BROKEN SWORD

| PUB. NIS America DEV. Hit Maker

ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

If you're an RPG aficionado, chances are you've got a laundry list of things you hate to see in your games. Chances are also pretty good that you'll find a fair number of those things present in *Blade Dancer*, the latest mediocre role-playing game to hit Sony's portable.

Blade Dancer starts off feeling like some sort of *Final Fantasy* clone with rather decent 3D graphics. But after about an hour (the amount of time you'll likely spend speaking to every useless character in the first town), things start to fall apart. And it's not just any one thing—it's the culmination of a lot of little things that ultimately kills the game.

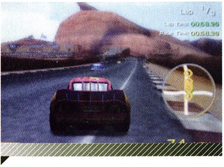
The combat seems like it should be interesting and, with features like special team attacks, sometimes it is. But then you realize that the weapon you just spent all your money on is about as solid as a china cup—yes, weapons break with use in this game. That's just one of the horrible, stale pitfalls *Blade Dancer* players will have to deal with.

Or how about the stupid save-point system? This is a real no-no in portable RPGs. In order to save your game, you'll have to travel back to the last glowing circle you visited. And, given the main character's snail-like running speed and the ridiculous amount of loading between areas, this can feel like a quest in and of itself. Not great if you have to shut off the system at the end of a bus ride and don't coincidentally happen to be right by a save point.

The list of disappointments goes on and on—cheesy plot, horrible dialogue and translation, bland graphics, and standard RPG clichés circa 1995 as far as the eye can see. The really sad part about all this is that *Blade Dancer* is a relatively decent game when you consider the RPG landscape of the PSP. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Another day, another boring role-playing game on the PSP.

SCORE 2|5



CARS

NO KICKS ON ROUTE 66

| PUB. THQ DEV. Locomotive Games
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

While *Cars* on the PS2 gets a bit of credit for at least trying to do something interesting with the world and characters presented in the latest Pixar flick, the PSP game...well, not so much.

Cars the PSP game is little more than a collection of races featuring characters from the movie. And while the graphics are good and the voices authentic, the content isn't nearly interesting enough to play for more than a few rounds.

The basic problem is that *Cars* lacks excitement. With no weapons or power-ups to shake things up a bit, you spend all your time motoring around the track in second place, trying to chase down the one superquick competitor who always seems to be outrunning you, and trying to find the shortcuts, half of which aren't even actually accessible, thanks to some really strange collision glitches.

The lack of weapons is probably some attempt to make the game really kid-friendly and nonviolent, and I can appreciate that sentiment. But despite that effort, *Cars* still fails in the whole kid-friendly department, because once you get as far as the first boss race, the difficulty level gets ratcheted up to stupid levels. The only chance you have of winning is to run a perfect race every single time, which isn't anywhere near what I would call "kid-friendly."

On the technical side of things, *Cars* actually plays pretty decently. The notorious analog nub doesn't hurt the handling of Lightning and his friends one little bit, but that just serves to make the ridiculous difficulty levels that much more frustrating.

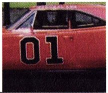
This game had potential. Heck, even if it had been a direct port of the PS2 title, it would've been more interesting. Unfortunately, the racing market on the PSP is a crowded one, and *Cars* isn't even worth putting on the grid. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Even if you're a *Cars* nut, there's very little to get excited about on the PSP besides the movie clips included in this game.

SCORE 2.5 | 5

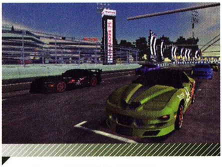
RINGTONES

One of the most bizarre features of the original *Juiced* makes the jump to the PSP as well—the option to choose your own licensed cell phone at the beginning of the game. Now you can show off your virtual Sony Ericsson to all your friends!



NEON KNIGHTS

Cars on the PSP takes place directly after the movie, where the biggest threat to Radiator Springs is the presence of the four hot-rodders only seen briefly in the flick. DJ, Wingo, and Boost are three tricked-out rice-rockets, while Snot Rod is a chronically sick, yet very powerful, Dodge Charger. Maybe he's related to the General Lee.



JUICED: ELIMINATOR

FAST BECOMING FURIOUS

| PUB. THQ DEV. Juice Games
ESRB T MSRP $39.99

Illegal street racing and the pimping of rides is all but played out as a gaming genre. Not only does *Juiced: Eliminator* have that going against it, but it's also based on a game most of us played last year on the PlayStation 2. Remember? The original survived the implosion of Acclaim; it was picked up and released by THQ instead.

Surprisingly, though, that's not my problem with this game. As far as street-racing titles go, *Juiced* offers quite a solid experience. The vehicle upgrades are nice, and the amount of tweaking you can do to things like the ratios and suspension is actually great.

And the event interface is fun, too. Call rival crew members to set up special events, run in prescheduled races, earn respect or ire from rival groups of racers, or just watch races and place bets on them.

So what's with the low score?

Well, the controls are just busted in *Juiced*. Whether you use the analog nub or the digital pad, you never feel like you've got real control over your car, as it skates and understeers through even the most gradual curves. Using the analog stick makes your steering react too quickly, resulting in a lot of front-end push or a tiny turn radius if you're running too slowly. And using the D-pad results in a complete lack of response from the steering.

No matter how great the nuts and bolts of the game are, when you can't really control the thing, it's pretty hard to recommend it. Some people will be able to get past the interface issues, and they'll love what *Juiced* has to offer. But most of us will give up in disgust after an hour or so of struggling with the ganked steering setup. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT An excellent game crippled by bad control.

SCORE 2.5 | 5

Lap
Race time 00:37
Lap time 00:37
PlayStation 2
053

RACE DRIVER 2006

BURNING PORTABLE RUBBER

| PUB. Codemasters DEV. Sumo Digital
ESRB T MSRP $39.99

One major disappointment to get out of the way before we continue—why did Codemasters decide that *Race Driver 2006* should be based on the now-two-year-old *TOCA Race Driver 2* rather than the recently released *TOCA Race Driver 3*? The extra tracks, cars, and modes found in the third game would've been a welcome addition to this solid portable racer.

The mind wobbles.

Anyhoo, what we've got here is one of the best multistyle racing games around, shrunk to portable form. If you played *TOCA 2* a couple of years back, you know exactly what to expect here; the story mode follows the exact same plot, and for the most part, your racing series options are the same—albeit with a few new tracks and cars thrown in for good measure.

The translation holds up well on the PSP. The graphics are well done, and the analog nub manages to control the action without too many problems. Sumo Digital even succeeded in getting the large groups of cars crammed into each race (a critical part of *TOCA*'s fantastic "pack-racing" feel), though the trade-off ends up being a slight framerate hit during some events, and especially during replays.

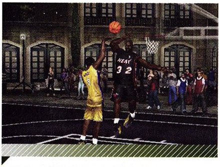
And the classic *TOCA* play style, where you run short bursts of two or three races in each series, is absolutely perfect for a portable system. You don't need to invest a lot of time when you want to play a quick round, which is great.

Or at least, it would be—were it not for the relatively gargantuan load times. *Race Driver 2006* is another example of the PSP's desperate need for a good background-loading setup or games on a memory stick.

Still, with the slew of driving games hitting Sony's pocket monster lately, *Race Driver* manages to finish near the front of the pack. Framerate problems, massive loading, and a slightly stale feeling keep it from a podium appearance, though. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT A really solid racer that feels a tad dated and features way too much load time.

SCORE 3.5 | 5



NBA BALLERS: REBOUND

FEELS LIKE A PORT, LOOKS LIKE A PORT...MUST BE A PORT

PUB. Midway **DEV.** Backbone Entertainment
ESRB E **MSRP** $39.99

I'm not sure why Midway calls this game *NBA Ballers: Rebound* instead of *NBA Ballers: Phenom* (which is what the PS2 version of the game was called). Maybe it's to help differentiate the game with the lame load times and inferior controls from the one that's actually fun to play.

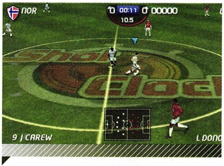
Once the game loads, *Rebound*'s single-player mode focuses on the same entertaining rags-to-riches-with-a-twist story from the PS2 version. Start out as a nobody, win games, acquire stuff, bling yourself out, all in the hope of blinging yourself out some more. Along the way, get advised by cover guy Chauncey Billups and rapper Ludacris, and ball at the cribs of the NBA's elite.

The sweet player models from the console look as good on the PSP, and with such an immensely detailed create-a-player feature, you can nearly reproduce yourself—but be forewarned that you'll be waiting around here as well. The load times going from option to option make you ponder scrapping the process altogether and just playing some 1-on-1-on-1. The problem is that, while that was a great mode on the console, all play on the PSP is hampered by the controls. Since all the moves were designed for two analog sticks—the PSP has one—*Rebound* leaves you doing the same moves over and over, even though each star possesses a multitude of jukes. On defense, you feel like you're just waiting to get the ball back. Trying to block, steal, or even get in position for a board proves futile. Shouldn't you be able to board in a game called *Rebound*?

The few new modes exclusive to the PSP can't offset the lack of unlockable content when compared to the console. Multiplayer via ad hoc lets you customize games and do *NBA Jam* players-on-fire kind of stuff. I enjoyed the console version, but I can't fathom parting with money to own *Rebound*. You'll find better PSP streetball elsewhere. | *Patrick Mauro*

GOOD Player models look incredibly accurate
BAD Load times make you ponder violence

SCORE 2.5 5



WORLD TOUR SOCCER '06

ARCADES EVERYWHERE SHOULD BE LIKE THIS

PUB. Sony CEA **DEV.** SCEE London
ESRB E **MSRP** $39.99

***World Tour* has** plenty of soccer to be played, but it all comes in five- to 10-minute doses. This title isn't an attempt to out-sim *Winning Eleven* (which is probably wise on the developer's part), but the fast-and-loose arcade-style gameplay is accurate enough to feel like actual soccer. *World Tour* wouldn't be quite a contender on the mothership PS2 as is, but on the PSP it feels just right.

The soccer itself is an arcade-style blast. It's easy to pick up and play, and once you start trying for the tougher challenges, the controls are accurate enough to reward you for setting up your plays correctly. Load times are fast enough that you're not bored with the PSP by the time your match starts, and it's easy to finish a satisfying match in anywhere from two to 10 minutes, which is perfect for portability. The players, fields, and stadiums all look good enough, but the player animation brings it home—it's easy to follow exactly what's going on by watching your players move.

The 10 different challenges all reward different aspects of playing well, from Shot Clock's demand that you try for the goal quickly or lose possession to Totally Outnumbered's self-explanatory challenge. Nailing each challenge successfully is what brings out the depth in the game while keeping it very friendly for portable play. And *World Tour* includes not only ad hoc but also full infrastructure play and game sharing, making it all the more perfect for the PSP.

The inevitable "but" that *World Tour* brings to the table, though, is this: The lack of any kind of career mode is atrocious. While the *SSX*-style unlocking of thing after thing is rewarding, so is feeling a real connection to a team you've groomed and led. It wouldn't hurt to feel more in control of the shot, either—shots go about where you put them, no better. | *Patrick Joynt*

VERDICT Arcade deliciousness is soured by the lack of a career mode, but it's still oh so sweet.

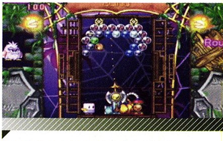
SCORE 3.5 5

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

After Young MC's "Bust a Move" peaked in 1989, he gradually faded from the public eye. However, this year, he showed up where all aging musicians eventually do: on VH1, as one of the contestants on *Celebrity Fit Club 3*.

DUBIOUS WIN

After tying their first match in the 2006 FIFA World Cup, Tunisia had failed to win nine consecutive World Cup matches—the North African side hasn't won a World Cup match since beating Mexico 3-1 in 1978. And in their draw versus Saudi Arabia, they allowed the Saudis their first open-play score since the 1994 World Cup. Poor Tunisia.



BUST-A-MOVE DELUXE

YOU KNOW WHAT TO DO, G

PUB. Majesco **DEV.** Taito
ESRB E **MSRP** $29.99

It's been 12 years since the first game in the *Bust-a-Move* series (which is known as *Puzzle Bobble* over in Japan) was released, but those 12 years have seen numerous releases across almost every platform, including five different PS1 and PS2 titles. Throughout it all, the core gameplay has remained the same, and this latest version on the PSP doesn't break that tradition.

For those not familiar with the game, the whole point of *Bust-a-Move* is to clear the screen, which you do by shooting balls onto the board in an attempt to connect three or more of the same color, causing them to disappear; once you've got a clean slate, you move onto the next new configuration (the game holds more than 1,000 puzzles overall).

In addition to classic mode, there are a number of other variations. Some, such as Ghost (where the ball must bounce off a wall before it'll stick to the other balls) or Seesaw (where the screen tilts to the left or right based on how many balls are on each side) have been in prior versions of the game, but there are also four modes making their debuts here on the PSP. Of those, two are good for novelty, and that's it; however, Running Launcher (where the launcher constantly slides back and forth) and Mix 'Em Up (where bubbles randomly switch color) provide fun twists on the old standard.

You can also take on an opponent (whether it's the CPU or a real-life person over ad hoc), but what's a downer is that you can only play against one challenger as opposed to the three that the DS version allows. And I would have liked it if the high-scores board had a spot for initials—half the fun of a game like this is getting to claim bragging rights to the top slot.

Nevertheless, with virtually no load times and easy controls, it's a nice, simple, portable pleasure, and I'd argue that games like this are actually better on the go than they are in their original console-bound form. | *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT You've seen most of it before, but it works well.

SCORE 3.5 5

[John Tenney, Thea Gill]

MASTERS OF HORROR: HOMECOMING

THE WAR AT HOME

by John Scalzi

Here's an interesting thing: We're three years into our war in Iraq, and what major Hollywood films do we have to show for it? I'm sitting here racking my brain and, aside from *Fahrenheit 9/11* (which was about other things, too), I'm really not coming up with much. Hollywood has been notorious for ignoring military conflicts (other than World War II) while they were still ongoing, and the current Iraq War is no exception. There's such a manifest paucity of films about our current war that a cheapie TV flick called *Homecoming*, made for Showtime's *Masters of Horror* series, is, to date, the angriest, most vivid film about the war that's been made.

The story is told from the point of view of a cynical political operative (John Tenney) who unintentionally unleashes a flood of zombies on the world when, during a talk show, he suggests to a grieving military mother that if her dead son were to come back he'd support the war. Well, the dead son does come back—as do all the dead sons, daughters, husbands, and wives—and what all these zombies want to do is not to eat brains but to vote. And how do they vote? Well, I'm sure you can guess.

This cheapie has top-flight talent attached (director Joe Dante, screenwriter Sam Hamm), but because it was made for cable and cost about as much as money you can find in your seat cushions, it can afford to be what more expensive films apparently cannot: genuinely white-hot outraged about the war. Whether or not you agree with the film's obvious point of view, what you might want to find outrageous is that it's only this film that has a point of view about one of the defining events of our time. How sad is it that the only film we have that will speak truth to power is a low-budget, one-hour zombie flick on Showtime?

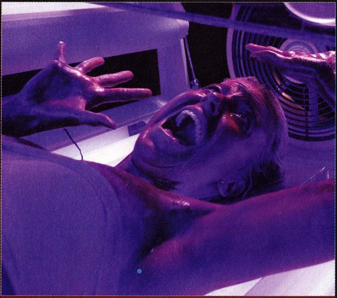
SCORE 4|5

ATL

Tip Harris, Evan Ross

It's another urban coming-of-age story, this time from the perspective of two kids living with their uncle in Atlanta. Should you care? Sure, because the film's got smarts and heart, and isn't just another chip off the John Singleton block. The characters aren't perfect or perfectly flawed, either; they seem real, and that's a harder trick than it sounds. Also, it's the first film in living memory that doesn't make a roller rink look like the lamest place on earth.

SCORE 3.5 | 5

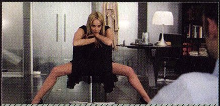


FINAL DESTINATION 3

Mary Elizabeth Winstead, Ryan Merriman

I can't say that the *Final Destination* movies are my all-time favorite horror flicks—I'm unmoved by the plight of idiotic teens who so stupidly flout common sense that the direct intervention of death itself in their onscreen demises seems hardly needed. But this particular DVD is a hoot because it adds a new wrinkle to your viewing experience: a setting in which you can choose whether characters live or die—a sort of *Choose Your Own Adventure* option in which, instead of going right or left, someone dies in a car accident...or not (alternate, previously unseen scenes keep things going). Yes, cineastes, it trashes the auteur vision, as it were, to have home audiences mashing their DVD buttons to fiddle with the plot. But come on: This ain't *Jules and Jim*. And I had fun offing characters at whim. You probably will, too.

SCORE 3 | 5

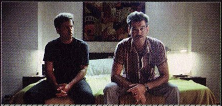


BASIC INSTINCT 2

Sharon Stone, David Morrissey

The reason to see this film: to see if Sharon Stone, theoretically old enough now to be a grandmother, is still smokin' hot naked. The answer: sure is. So that's the good news. The bad news is that none of the 48-year-old people you will meet in real life will ever look that hot, and that includes you. Deep down, you probably knew that. The rest of the film, incidentally? A waste of your time. You probably knew that, too.

SCORE 1.5 | 5

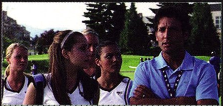


THE MATADOR

Pierce Brosnan, Greg Kinnear

Pierce Brosnan is now in the post-Bond phase of his career, in which we get to see if he ends up like Sean Connery or like Roger Moore. The good news is that *The Matador* shows that Brosnan isn't interested in playing it safe; he plays a gone-to-hell, broken-down assassin who's like Bond would eventually be if he lived in something like reality. It's a smart, funny, vivid performance. Nice to have you back in the real world, Pierce.

SCORE 4 | 5



SHE'S THE MAN

Amanda Bynes, Channing Tatum

This teen comedy is based on Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, which is like saying that a hot dog is based on sirloin. It's more accurate to say the flick is based on *10 Things I Hate About You*, which is a film that really was a successful transfer of Shakespeare to a high-school milieu—but then we're back to whole hot dog comparison thing. Look, the fact that I'm even mentioning this flick should signal to you how bereft of good DVDs this month is.

SCORE 2 | 5

RELEASE DATES

July 4

The Matador

July 11

Basic Instinct 2

Masters of Horror: Homecoming

Tristam Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story

July 18

ATL

She's the Man

July 25

The Benchwarmers

Final Destination 3

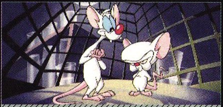
Pinky and the Brain: Volume 1

THE BENCHWARMERS

Rob Schneider, Jon Heder

I know people who were excited for this film because Jon Heder, aka Napoleon Dynamite, was in it, and they were hoping for a little more "Vote for Pedro" love. Well, see, here's the thing: The film also stars Rob Schneider and David Spade, either of whom is a whirling vortex of film comedy suck in himself—and, together in the same film, they're like a feculent black hole of crapitude. And then there's Jon Lovitz. Flee, people! Flee!

SCORE 1.5 | 5



PINKY AND THE BRAIN

Maurice LaMarche, Rob Paulsen

A laboratory mouse that looks and sounds like Orson Welles, trying to take over the world through the use of overly complex plans—aided by his insane chum, whom he beats on a regular basis? This show had me at hello. Between these guys and the *Animaniacs* (who also have a DVD collection out this month), kids' TV animation was again made safe for adults in the mid-'90s—well, for adult geeks, anyway. I can't wait to warp my own kid with these.

SCORE 5 | 5

TRISTAM SHANDY: A COCK AND BULL STORY

Steve Coogan, Gillian Anderson

This movie is ostensibly based on a somewhat surreal 18th-century novel neither you nor probably anyone you know has read. It's not really that important to the movie, which is one of those "movie about a movie" movies, in which the actors play themselves playing themselves playing their roles and whatnot. Yes, it's actually quite funny, and you'll feel awfully literate having watched it.

SCORE 3.5 | 5

1UP RADIO

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NETWORK

REPLAY

REVVING UP THE PLAYSTATION WAYBACK MACHINE

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THE FANTASTICS

THE MEN WHO MADE FF GREAT

INSIDE

92 THE OPPOSITE OF FUN
Trust us—you do NOT want to load these games.

94 THE LOST WEEKEND
If you've got 72 hours and a videogame rental place handy, we've got the essential list for you.

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The PlayStation's biggest sellers, at only $20 apiece!

97 PS1-DERLAND
To rent or to buy?

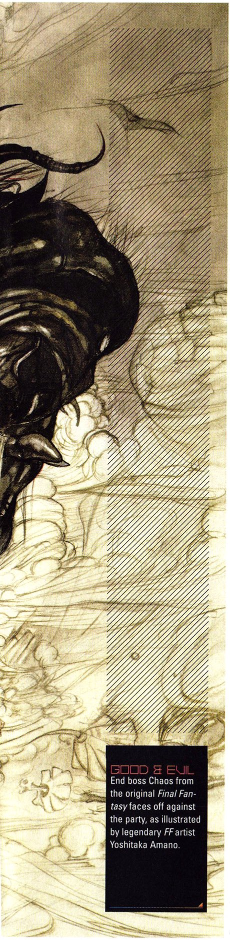
FF

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

THE MEN WHO MAKE THE FANTASY HAPPEN

by Jeremy Parish

The *Final Fantasy* series has a long and storied history—but far too often, the importance of the minds behind the games is overlooked. It's all well and good to mull the impact of *FFIV*'s active-time battle system or the immensity of *FFVII*'s anime-inspired plot, but equally significant is the ever-changing lineup of developers and designers responsible for *Final Fantasy*'s mercurial changes. We've traced the series' family tree, and here we present the men who have transformed a humble 8-bit RPG into an all-encompassing global franchise.



GOOD & EVIL
End boss Chaos from the original *Final Fantasy* faces off against the party, as illustrated by legendary *FF* artist Yoshitaka Amano.

THE OLD SCHOOL

Final Fantasy has changed a great deal over the years—but in the end, there's still a little part of each new game that hearkens back to the original. While most of the series' founders have moved along to new ventures, their names are fondly remembered by *Final Fantasy*'s most loyal fans.

HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI

The Creator

Final Fantasy I - X-2

Without Hironobu Sakaguchi, there would be no *Final Fantasy*.

In 1987, Sakaguchi was a hardworking designer at Square, one of countless developers trying to carve a niche for itself on Nintendo's insanely popular Famicom (better known as the NES in America). Square's output to that point had been largely unremarkable. The company was primarily known for simple games of questionable merit: *King's Knight* (a top-down shooter with a medieval theme and half-baked RPG elements) and *Apple Town Story* (a poor knockoff of *Little Computer People*, a groundbreaking Commodore 64 title).

It wasn't until the release of *Final Fantasy* that Square began to grow into the powerhouse it is today. While inspired somewhat by then-competitor Enix's groundbreaking *Dragon Quest*, Sakaguchi's RPG also had a great deal in common with pen-and-paper role-playing games such as *Dungeons & Dragons*—players controlled a party of warriors drawn from six character classes, and many of the enemies were seemingly taken straight from TSR's *Monstrous Compendium*. But thanks to solid gameplay, slick graphics, and strong support from Nintendo, *FF* was a smash hit the world over.

Its success was hardly a given, though. In a 1999 interview with *NextGen* magazine, Sakaguchi confessed that the game's title was actually pessimistic: Poor sales had put Square in a bind, and if the new RPG didn't do well, the company would be out of business. It was, literally, Square's *final* fantasy.

Of course, it was a dazzling success, paving the way for many superb sequels...and endless wags who think it's clever to remark on the irony of having a *twelfth "final" fantasy!* (In other words, a bittersweet victory.)

While Sakaguchi was involved with *FF* games up through *FFX-2*, his role became increasingly managerial over time. He did, however, take an active hand in the creation of the determinedly old-school *FFIX*, ensuring that personal favorites like original *FF* villain Garland were given meaty parts.

Unfortunately, shortly after the release of *FFIX*, Square launched its first full-length motion picture: the Sakaguchi-directed *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*. Fans hated it for having nothing whatsoever to do with the games; critics hated it for not being a very interesting movie. The film's shocking failure—it earned nearly $124 million less than it cost to produce—meant it really *was* Square's "final" fantasy; the financial damage likely paved the way for longtime competitor Enix to initiate a merger.

Sakaguchi was demoted by way of reprimand and soon left the company to found his own development and planning studio, Mistwalker. In an oddly circular bit of history, Mistwalker's upcoming Xbox 360 RPGs are Microsoft's *Final Fantasys*, in a sense—the American giant is banking on *Blue Dragon* and *Lost Odyssey* to shore up flagging Japanese interest in the console.

NOBUO UEMATSU

The Bard

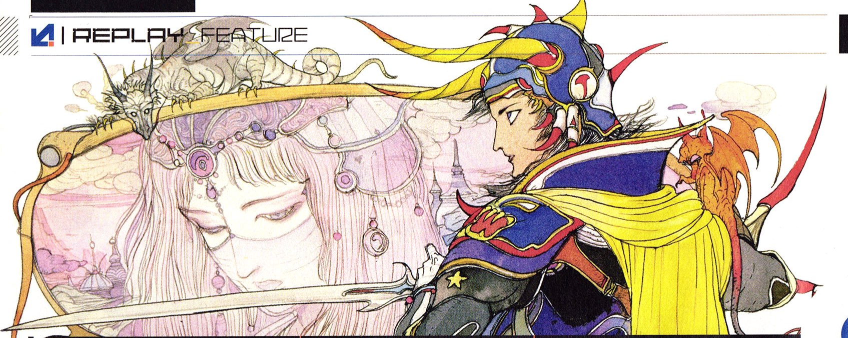
Final Fantasy I - XIII

Composer Nobuo Uematsu has likely done more to win the hearts of *Final Fantasy* fans than any of his peers. His majestic themes and character-driven leitmotivs have been a calling card of the series since its beginning, and his soundtrack collections have sold millions of copies. More importantly, Uematsu's music has made each game's dramatic events all the more memorable.

Uematsu's compositions have always been known for their intricacy. His early work in the 8-bit era was unusually sophisticated for the time, and several pieces featured in the original *FF*—including the "Prelude" and "Crystal Theme"—have appeared in practically every sequel in some form or another.

With the shift to 16-bit technology, Uematsu's music went from good to great; his work for *FFIV* through *FFVI* is widely regarded as some of the finest ever in a videogame. The complexity afforded by the Super NES' Sony sound chip allowed Uematsu to blend driving rock with classical themes, resulting in startling innovations like *FFVI*'s opera.

Uematsu's range expanded even further when the series shifted to the PlayStation, although many fans criticized his choice of instruments—particularly in the *FFVII* score, which many felt sounded overly flat and synthesized. Nevertheless, even the harshest critics were impressed with the



game's operatic final-battle theme ("One-Winged Angel"), and the more naturalistic sound of *FFVIII*'s score won back many fans with its mellow acoustic sounds (and some funky licks from his new favorite toy, a Fender Telecaster).

After splitting the writing duties on *FFX* with Masashi Hamauzu and Junya Nakano, Uematsu left Square to go freelance. While he hasn't severed his ties to Square Enix, Uematsu is no longer the only person shaping the *Final Fantasy* soundscape.

YOSHITAKA AMANO

The Artist

Final Fantasy I - XIII

Prolific artist Yoshitaka Amano has exerted a tremendous influence over the look and feel of the *Final Fantasy* series; his epic paintings inspired by the original game lent drama that 8-bit graphics simply couldn't convey. However, his ornate and often grotesque monster designs translated admirably into pixel art, adding a touch of grace to the game's otherwise simplistic visuals. While the final in-game sprites rarely resembled his delicate character designs, his visual sense was nevertheless vital in shaping the first six *FF*s.

Amano's influence lessened during the 32-bit era, and was limited primarily to watercolor renditions of other people's characters (many of which are poorly regarded by fans for their rushed appearance). Still, Amano's presence remains consistent in one regard: He has painted the logo for every *FF* game to date, including all three chapters of *FFXIII*.

NASIR GEBELLI

The Engineer

Final Fantasy, FFII, FFIII

Iranian programmer Nasir Gebelli was something of a legend in the PC scene when he was recruited by Square to help make their early Famicom software, and he quickly earned his keep with early technological masterpieces *Rad Racer* and *3-D WorldRunner*. His prowess was invaluable during the development of the original *Final Fantasy*, although he's probably best known for his work on *Final Fantasy* spin-off *Secret of Mana* (since his name appears on the title screen).

HIROMICHI TANAKA

The Old-Schooler

FFII, FFIII, FFIV, FFXI, FFIII DS

Of all the designers currently involved in the nuts and bolts of the *FF* series, Hiromichi Tanaka has been around the longest. Sure, Kawazu has him beat by a game (Tanaka joined for 1988's *FFII*), but while Kawazu tends to work in a more supervisory capacity these days, Tanaka remains in the thick of things.

As one of the guiding minds behind *FFXI*, Tanaka has had the unenviable task of keeping the series competitive in the crowded MMO space. Currently, he is producing the long-awaited DS remake of *FFIII*, ensuring its new-school technology doesn't compromise the fidelity of its classic gameplay.

THE NEW SCHOOL

TETSUYA NOMURA

The Designer

FFIV - VIII, X, X-2, Compilation of FFVII, XIII

Tetsuya Nomura has been with the *FF* series longer than just about anyone else involved in the Fabula Nova Crystallis project—his first *Final Fantasy* title was 1991's *FFIV* for the Super NES. In that sense, it might seem perfectly natural that he would be the one to hold the reins to *Final Fantasy*'s future...until you consider the fact that he originally became involved in the games as a graphic designer.

How does one go from being a lowly sprite artist to being the guiding mind behind what is arguably gaming's biggest franchise? Nomura credits his success to "being able to create characters that are derived from the same world but which are able to retain concepts and elements that are uniquely their own." In short, the answer seems quite simple: keep it real... and deliver what the fans want.

Nomura's big break came when he was tapped to create the character designs for *Final Fantasy VII*. His anime-like characters, with their over-the-top hairstyles and colorful costumes, were a bold departure from Yoshitaka Amano's wispy artwork, which until then had been the guiding vision for the series. The true significance of Nomura's designs lay in their pragmatism: his angular style could easily be translated into the PlayStation's 3D graphics.

In short order, Nomura became the designer for most of Square's high-profile games, including *Parasite Eve*, *The Bouncer*, and *FFVIII* and *X*. The Disney crossover *Kingdom Hearts* marked his debut as a director. Despite widespread criticism of the game's flaws—most notably its awkward camera and repetitive action—it was a massive sales success. Nomura also helmed *FFVII*'s motion-picture sequel *Advent Children*—its success further cemented his reputation for delivering what fans want.

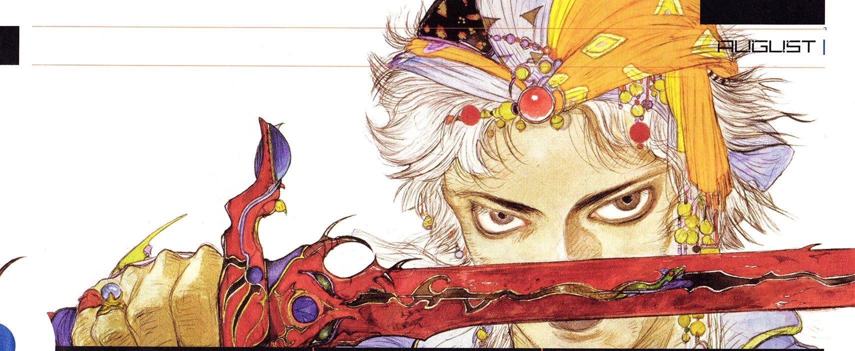
Nomura's work is not without its detractors, particularly older *FF* fans who dislike the more commercial bent and garish fashions of recent sequels. Ultimately, though, he feels the best approach to design is to focus on the needs of each project. "In general, I design my characters based on the setting of the game, but the key is to find the right balance of the team's request and my design taste," he says. The continuing popularity of his creations makes him a natural choice to head up the Fabula Nova Crystallis project.

YOSHINORI KITASE

The Planner

FFV - VIII, X, X-2, Compilation of FFVII, XIII

Although Yoshinori Kitase began in the humble role of planner (*Final Fantasy Adventure* and *FFV*), he demonstrated his true talent for storytelling as codirector of



fan-favorites *FFVI* and *Chrono Trigger*. He served as the sole director of the next two chapters, which were even more successful, and has since assumed the role of series producer. His games are notable for their emphasis on plot and character development, and he often incorporates shocking story twists that reveal unexpected facets of the hero's life; for example, such surprising tidbits include Squall's (*FFVIII*) discovering that his neglectful dad was President of the World, and Tidus' (*FFX*) learning that he was raised by a pack of wild hair-care products.

MOTOMU TORIYAMA
The Ladies' Man

FFX, FFX-2, FFXIII

Many *FF* fans were surprised by the announcement that *FFXIII*'s directorial duties would be handled by Motomu Toriyama, a relative unknown for the series. But, given what we know of *FFXIII*, his involvement should perhaps be of little surprise. As the event planner for several previous games—that is, the person responsible for coordinating all the cool story-related happenings that make each *FF* so memorable—his flair for the dramatic seems a perfect fit for *FFXIII*'s rather cinematic approach to the most mundane elements, such as combat.

And since he made his debut as director with the girl-powered *FFX-2*, it shouldn't come as a surprise that all we really know about *FFXIII*'s story is that it has something to do with a sexy lady with a propensity for serious ass-kicking.

KAZUSHIGE NOJIMA
The Writer

FFVII, VIII, X, X-2, Compilation of FFVII, FFXII

Scenario writer Kazushige Nojima is considered by some to be the most underappreciated man in the *Final Fantasy* business. While his name is rarely mentioned in most discussions of the series, it's his writing that has guided the all-important plotlines of nearly every chapter since *FFVII*. Most recently, he joined the *FFXII* team to help ensure a smooth release despite the game's rocky development history.

YASUMI MATSUNO
The Genius

Final Fantasy Tactics, FFXII

Yasumi Matsuno's involvement with the *FF* series has been fairly minimal, yet he commands a loyal fan base that reveres his unique design sensibilities, love of intricate plots, and mature storytelling. While his first foray into the *Final Fantasy* universe left some disappointed (thanks largely to the unconventional gameplay and wretched English translation of *FF Tactics*), his follow-up, *Vagrant Story*, is regarded as one of the finest PS1 adventures ever created.

Vagrant Story's success and sophistication likely made Matsuno a shoo-in as director of *FFXII*, which takes the series' narrative and gameplay in bold new directions. Unfortunately, health issues prevented Matsuno from seeing his creation to its conclusion; he left the project some time after E3 2004. The strange circumstances of his departure have given rise to all manner of speculation, but Square Enix will only say that he is currently on an indefinite leave. Happily, *FFXII* appears to have turned out marvelously, but Matsuno fans continue to hope that he'll return to gaming soon.

AKIHIKO YOSHIDA
The Illustrator

Final Fantasy Tactics, FFXII, FFIII DS

Akihiko Yoshida's artwork seems to go hand-in-hand with Matsuno's games: the two first collaborated on Quest's *Ogre Battle* and *Tactics Ogre*. When Quest was snatched up by Square, they continued to work together on hits like *Final Fantasy Tactics*.

Versatility is a hallmark of Yoshida's work, which ranges from the cartoonish midgets of the *Tactics* games to the baroque catacombs of *Vagrant Story*. *FFXII* is easily his most impressive work to date; his unique design sensibilities have resulted in a gorgeous medieval world packed with detail.

In Matsuno's absence, Yoshida's talents have been put to use in other projects, including heading up a complete visual overhaul of Famicom classic *Final Fantasy III* for DS.

AKITOSHI KAWAZU
The Innovator

Final Fantasy, FFII, Crystal Chronicles, FFXII

Akitoshi Kawazu is a controversial name among RPG fanatics, thanks to his persistent habit of creating iconoclastic game systems that defy gamer expectations. While frequently breathtaking in their innovations, Kawazu's games are often accused of feeling unpolished.

Kawazu first made his mark as the designer of *Final Fantasy II* and is largely credited (or blamed) for the game's radical departures from its predecessor. Most strikingly, he completely overhauled the character experience system; rather than the traditional shared-experience style common to most RPGs, *FFII* utilized a highly specific format that granted characters bonuses only for the categories they utilized. For instance, a warrior who used only knives would become highly proficient with them—but would be grossly underpowered with all other forms of weapons. While logical, this structure led to immense tedium as players were often forced to train their characters in certain skills before being able to advance through certain sections of the game.

While Square ultimately chose to incorporate more traditional systems in subsequent *FF* titles, Kawazu's ideas found a home in the *SaGa* games (which were initially brought to America under the name *Final Fantasy Legend*). He made his return to the series as the creator of the GameCube-exclusive *Crystal Chronicles*, and has more recently taken the lead spot in the *FFXII* team following Yasumi Matsuno's abrupt departure. |

THE OPPOSITE OF FUN

LOOK IN HORROR AS WE BROWSE THE WORST PLAYSTATION GAMES EVER MADE

by robert ashley

The long and glorious road traveled by the PlayStation brand has been pockmarked by its fair share of potholes. Here for your education are 20 games that you must, by all means, never, ever play. Ignore this advice at your own peril.

PS2

1 Catwoman

OPM SCORE: 1

Catwoman, both the game and the movie, existed solely to show off the fabulous body of Halle Berry. And who could argue with such a premise? Unfortunately, everything else about this game emanates comical stink lines. It's a train wreck of stupid control and stupider enemies. Even Berry's feline grace couldn't overcome this level of lameness.

2 DICE: DNA Integrated Cybernetic Enterprises

OPM SCORE: .5

Cynical cartoon creator: I've got a great idea. What if we made a show about robotic dinosaurs that turn into cars? It's the male, ages 6-12 triple threat! **Cynical game developer**: Perfect. We could just tack a crappy racing game onto a crappy action game and call it a day....

3 Driven

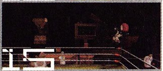
OPM SCORE: 1

Most games on this list are victims of neglect, half-thought-out concepts, and cheapo execution. *Driven*'s brand of stupid, however, required effort. Witness the cinematic camera angle shifts that, while exciting, completely rob you of your ability to drive. Marvel at the insane blurring effects that, while conveying a sense of intense speed, blind you. Like many new college grads, *Driven* is an ambitious failure.

4 Fugitive Hunter

OPM SCORE: 1

Fugitive Hunter is proof positive that the terrorists



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MP 550
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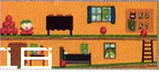
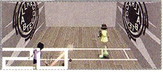




are winning. A bottom-feeding cash-in on post-9/11 mania, *Hunter* is the only game that lets you beat up Osama bin Laden in a fistfight. Yes, that's right. And in between such (sloppy, repetitive) fistfights, you get to mow down hundreds of generic beturbaned racial stereotypes. FDA stamp: "Not fit for human consumption."

5 The Guy Game

OPM Score: 1

Finally, a videogame that makes frat boys drink beer. With any luck, a game that makes fat kids eat cheeseburgers can't be far behind. *The Guy Game* is a drinking game in a quiz-show format. Except you're guessing what drunk girls will pick as the answer. The ultimate prize for winning? You get to see some boobs. This is the greatest breakthrough in gaming history.

6 McFarlane's Evil Prophecy

OPM Score: .5

Leave it to Todd McFarlane—the man who made leather bondage gear safe for kids—to suck every ounce of character and life from a game. *Evil Prophecy* is beyond generic, an invitation to repetitive-stress injury (X,X,X,O,O,O) wrapped in a blanket of bland art.

7 NARC

OPM Score: .5

NARC actually manages to make drugs seem uncool. Wow. Walking around a city full of escaped extras from an after-school special, you have two choices: Play another stupid mission in which you arrest someone with a series of golf-swing-meter button presses, or get high on drugs that double as useless power-ups. A life-threatening crack habit would be more fun.

8 Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 2: Battle Nexus

OPM Score: 1

Konami resurrected these toy commercial heroes of the '80s, only to defile our childhood memories with a total of three mindless, button-mashing calamities. Bucking the usual progression, the second game actually sucked worse than the first, which is actually its greatest accomplishment.

PS1

9 3Xtreme

OPM Score: 1

As with any product containing the word "xtreme," *3Xtreme* actually sucks the adrenaline out of your body. Nothing says hardcore skateboarding like hitting downhill slalom gates in a candy-colored world of art gone horribly wrong. Terminate with xtreme prejudice.

10 Armorines: Project S.W.A.R.M.

OPM Score: .5

That people were paid to make this game is one of the great injustices of the universe. *Armorines* is an assault on all that gamers hold dear, a horribly ugly, unending world of nothing...nothing but annoying clusters of cockroaches to shoot. It's really more of a living-in-the-projects simulator.

11 Batman Beyond: Return of the Joker

OPM Score: .5

A general rule of thumb: Batman + videogame = catastrophic failure. Sure, there are a few exceptions, but *Return of the Joker* destroys them. To play this game is to give up on life, to turn yourself over to boredom, frustration, and impending death. Here's a sample: Kick a telephone pole real hard. Then do it again 1,000 times, until your shins are mangled, bloody stumps. You win.

12 The Fifth Element

OPM Score: .5

The Fifth Element is a classic case of a movie license run amok. **Developer 1**: How can we turn a colorful, action-packed movie into a videogame? **Developer 2**: By creating a dull, empty world of muted gray sludge and giving the player a tiny selection of ridiculous-looking kung-fu moves. **Dev 1**: Hooray!

13 Hooters Road Trip

OPM Score: .5

What reward could possibly motivate a man to drive a car across 1,000 miles of boring Nowhere, U.S.A.? The promise of a grainy five-second video clip of a Hooters girl (big hair, cleavage, orange shorts, etc.) welcoming you to the chain's newest location. Bonus: The graphics look like a 10th-generation photocopy.

14 The Lost World: Jurassic Park

OPM Score: 1

If aliens descended onto planet Earth and somehow found a copy of this game, they would just blow the whole place up. You get to be the T-Rex! Well, only after you spend half the game as some helpless little nobody dinosaur who has to run away from anything that moves. This world should stay lost.

15 MTV's Celebrity Deathmatch

OPM Score: 1

Who doesn't want to watch the well-coiffed weirdos we call celebrities bash each others' brains in? If it involves a PlayStation controller, do yourself a favor and pass. *Deathmatch* follows the usual path from TV hit to videogame s***, a tossed-off fighter for the coordinationally challenged.

16 Racing

OPM Score: .5

Originally sold to cheapskate gamers at the budget price of $9.99, *Racing* is now worth approximately $49.99. As the title implies, *Racing* is the world's most generic racer. Colored boxes (cars) make their way around boring tracks at Sunday-driver speed. Your mom saw you play this game and cried. She raised a failure.

17 Shadow Tower

OPM Score: .5

Navigate an endless labyrinth of indistinguishable dungeon hallways! Hold back the urge to vomit as a gray-brown, superpixelated videogame purgatory strobes across the screen! *Shadow Tower* combines the tension of a lame haunted house and a mystery on par with finding your car keys.

18 South Park: Chef's Luv Shack

OPM Score: 1

The funniest joke in this *South Park* party game is that some people, way back in the day, actually bought it. Join the cartoon's cast for a few rounds of repetitive trivia and low-budget minigames that make Internet advergames (punch George W. Bush!) seem deep.

19 Spec Ops

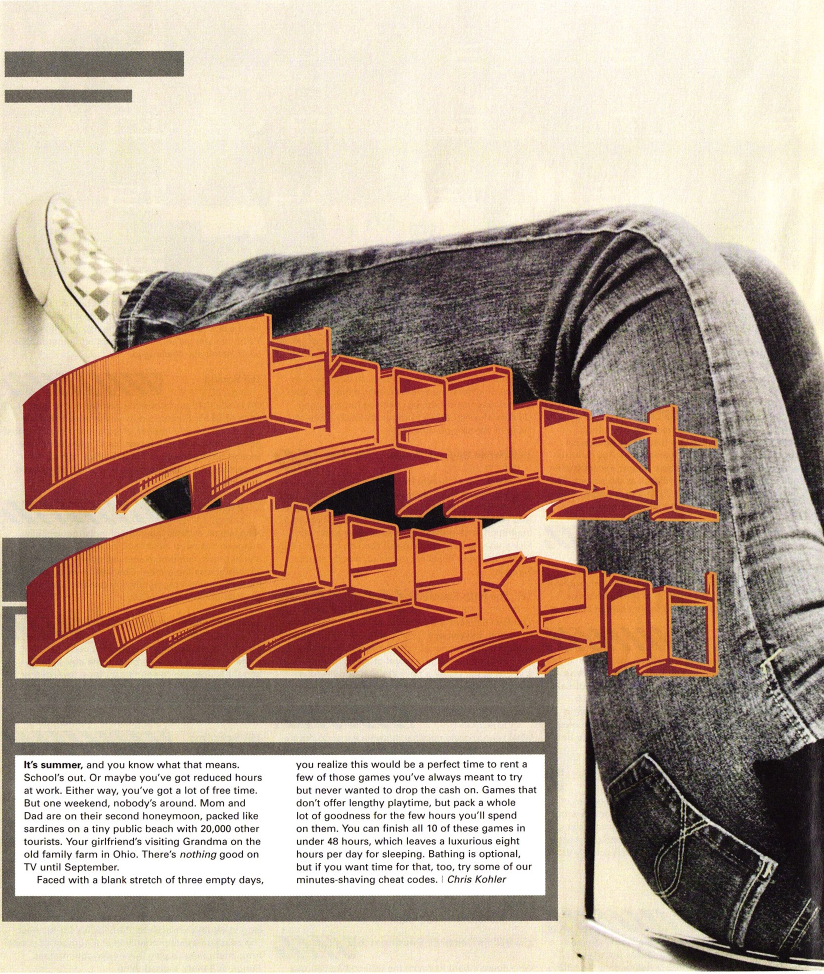
OPM Score: 1

The *Spec Ops* series produced Happy Meal–toy versions of the fancy squad-based style shooters that PC gamers enjoyed at the turn of the gaming century. Too bad your band of brothers didn't have enough IQ points between them to pull a trigger. Not that you could tell in the mud-colored ugly sauce the games slathered themselves in. The production of *Spec Ops* discs was a crime against nature. Please recycle them.

20 Street Racquetball

OPM Score: .5

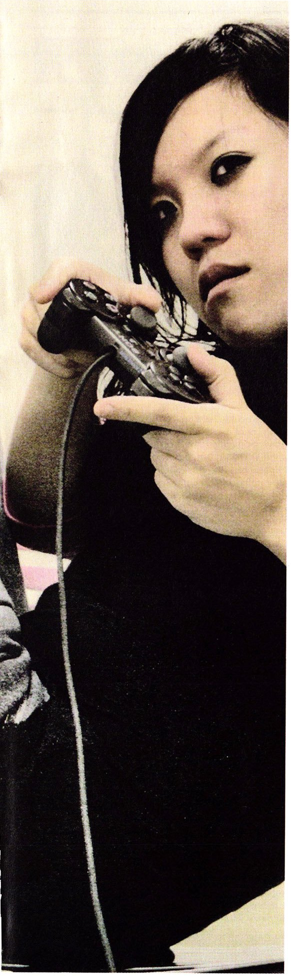
Through the magic of gaming, *Street Racquetball* transforms full-bodied racquetball players into peg-legged visual abstractions. Perhaps it's for the best. The beastly visuals probably kept a number of people from attempting to play this unplayable mutant *Pong*—and that's a good thing.



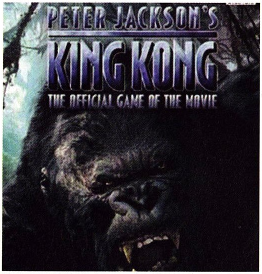
The Lost Weekend

It's summer, and you know what that means. School's out. Or maybe you've got reduced hours at work. Either way, you've got a lot of free time. But one weekend, nobody's around. Mom and Dad are on their second honeymoon, packed like sardines on a tiny public beach with 20,000 other tourists. Your girlfriend's visiting Grandma on the old family farm in Ohio. There's *nothing* good on TV until September.

Faced with a blank stretch of three empty days, you realize this would be a perfect time to rent a few of those games you've always meant to try but never wanted to drop the cash on. Games that don't offer lengthy playtime, but pack a whole lot of goodness for the few hours you'll spend on them. You can finish all 10 of these games in under 48 hours, which leaves a luxurious eight hours per day for sleeping. Bathing is optional, but if you want time for that, too, try some of our minutes-shaving cheat codes. | *Chris Kohler*



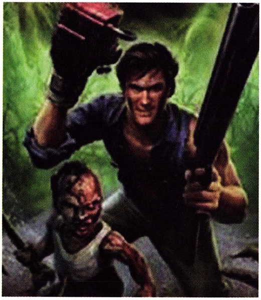
Peter Jackson's King Kong


PETER JACKSON'S
KING KONG
THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE

Figures that a game based on a long-ass movie would be hella short. Don't be fooled by the name at the beginning of the title; this breathtaking FPS is really *Rayman* creator Michel Ancel's baby. Breaking the trend of crappy movie-to-game conversions, *King Kong* immerses you into a detailed and freaky-scary representation of Skull Island, where run-and-gun takes a backseat to survival and strategy. The third-person Kong segments are pretty weak, but there aren't many of 'em.

TIME-SAVER: At the main menu, press Down, Circle, Up, Square, Down, Down, Up, Up while holding L1 and R1. In the Cheat menu that appears, type **8wonder** for invincibility and **GrosBras** for one-hit kills.

Evil Dead Regeneration



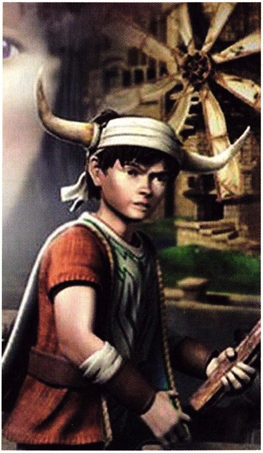
All games based on cult-hit horror films suck—except this one. Slice up zombies to your heart's content as chainsaw-armed Ash while the inimitable Bruce Campbell slings his signature one-liners. Even better, kicking a dead midget named Sam is a key gameplay mechanic: Boot him up onto a giant Deadite and he'll scratch out its eyes, if it has any. What could be finer?

Neo Contra

Usually, when Konami changes up the tried-and-true *Contra* formula, it's a disaster (see *Contra: Legacy of War*). But the top-down-perspective *Neo Contra* retains all the blink-and-you're-dog-meat intensity of the original side-scrollers. *Neo*'s not an easy game—get tagged by a bullet just once, and you're toast—but the continue system is fair. And if a buddy stops by to raid your fridge, he can jump in on the two-player mode.

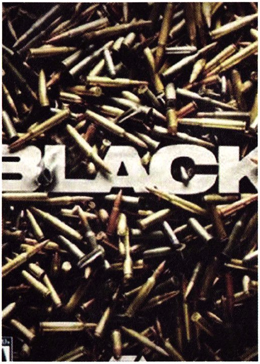
TIME-SAVER: Of course, it's a variation on the old Konami Code. At the title screen, hit Up, Up, Down, Down, L1, R1, L2, R2, L3, R3 for 19 extra lives.

ICO



Loved *Shadow of the Colossus*? Then find out where it all began with *Ico*. Your mission is to keep a young girl named Yorda safe in a vast castle full of shadowy creatures. Combat takes a back seat, though, to some tricky environment-based puzzle solving. The expressive character animations are unparalleled even today. Don't be surprised if you find yourself emotionally bonded with Ico and Yorda. Pity it's more of a summer fling than a lifelong love affair.

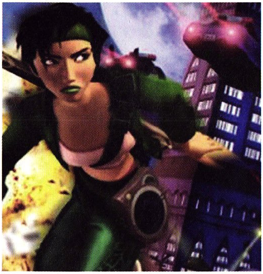
Black



EA introduced this original FPS to the world as "gun porn," and firearms enthusiasts will find *Black*'s array of realistic weaponry quite…arousing. The game's atmosphere is one of the most intense ever; right off the bat, you'll feel as if you're smack in the middle of an all-out war, with buildings crumbling around you and nothing but a massive weapon between you and death. Good times.

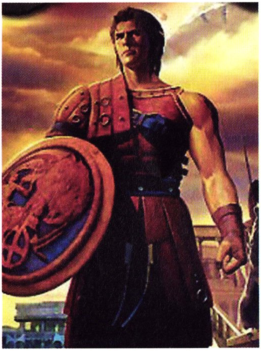
TIME-SAVER: If you want the überpowerful BFG right at the game's onset, enter FG6S-WFZG-7MDP-PZGT as your profile name.

Beyond Good & Evil



Man, Michel Ancel makes some short games. This is the game that caught Peter Jackson's eye in the first place, and you'll understand why within the first few minutes: The dramatic, cinematic storytelling will hook you right from the start. The *Zelda*-inspired action mechanics and photography minigame make exploring *BG&E*'s dystopian world a joy…just be prepared for a cliff-hanger ending that likely won't be resolved with a sequel anytime soon.

Rygar: The Legendary Adventure



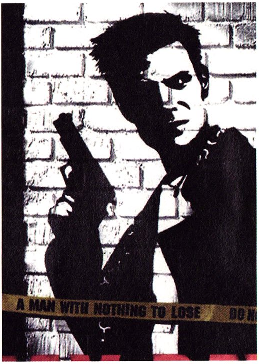
Tecmo's resurrection of its classic arcade franchise far outclasses the original, even if it's a little rough around the edges (it's vintage 2002, after all). We wonder how much inspiration *God of War* took from *Rygar*—from lengthy, swinging destructive weaponry to dramatic in-game camera angles. But one major area of difference is that Rygar himself is far more metrosexual than Kratos.

TIME-SAVER: Things getting too rough? To unlock the game's Easy mode, all you have to do is die three times in the Normal game.

Genji

Want to reenact some famous battles that actually took place in ancient Japan? Then take a look at this beautiful action game from the creator of *Street Fighter*. *Genji* controls the camera for you, so you can concentrate on slashing enemies and taking in the beauty of the environments. Sadly, the game ends before you get to attack the giant enemy crab for *massive damage*. You'll have to wait for the PS3 sequel to do that.

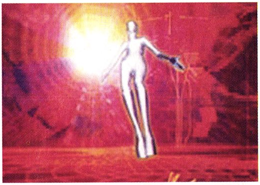
Max Payne


A MAN WITH NOTHING TO LOSE
DO N

Of all the games on this list, *Max Payne*'s visuals have probably held up the worst. The titular character looks more constipated than angry, and everything from the people to the cars is made up of chunky, angular blocks. But the cinematic presentation is impeccable—the story's told like a graphic novel alternating with real-time events smack in the middle of gameplay. But even if you find yourself anxious for more when you're done, you might want to skip the unimpressive sequel.

TIME-SAVER: Press Start to pause the game, then press L1, L1, L2, L2, R1, R1, R2, R2, Triangle, Circle, X, Square to make Max invincible.

Rez



We list Tetsuya Mizuguchi's defining classic last. This is not only because the synaesthetic light-and-sound extravaganza of a shooter is the ultimate short-but-hot game, but also because it is best enjoyed with your personal mind-altering substance of choice, whether that be caffeine or Splenda or both at once. We're not here to judge. Turn the lights off, crank the recliner back all the way, and get sucked into the colorful, musical world of *Rez*. Bullets fire and enemies explode, all to the beat of the music.

GREATEST HITS

Want to get more game for less? Check out the full roster of $19.99 Greatest Hits games for the PSP and PS2, and then give some of them a whirl on the demo disc.

GAME	OPM SCORE	ISSUE
PSP		
Ape Escape: On the Loose	3	93
ATV Offroad Fury: Blazin' Trails	3	94
Hot Shots Golf: Open Tee	4	95
Twisted Metal: Head-On	4	93
Wipeout Pure	4	93
PS2		
Ace Combat 04: Shattered Skies	4.5	51
Ace Combat 5: The Unsung War	4	87
ATV Offroad Fury	4	42
ATV Offroad Fury 2	4	64
ATV Offroad Fury 3	4	88
Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance	4.5	52
Brothers in Arms Road to Hill 30	3	92
Burnout 3 Takedown	**5**	**85**
Cabela's Big Game Hunter	2.5	67
Cabela's Dangerous Hunts	2.5	76
Call of Duty: Finest Hour	4	89
Champions of Norrath: Realms of EverQuest	4.5	78
Conflict: Desert Storm	1.5	63
Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex	3.5	51
Crash Nitro Kart	3.5	76
Crazy Taxi	4	46
Dark Cloud	4.5	46
Dave Mirra Freestyle BMX 2	3.5	50
Dead to Rights	3	65
Def Jam Vendetta	4	67
Def Jam Fight for NY	4.5	85
Destroy All Humans!	3	95
Devil May Cry	**5**	**50**
Devil May Cry 2	3	66
Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening	4.5	91
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai	3.5	65
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 2	2.5	76
Dragon Ball Z: Budokai 3	4	88
Dynasty Warriors 4	4.5	68
Enter the Matrix	3	71
Fight Night 2004	4	80
Fight Night Round 2	4.5	91
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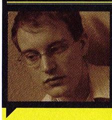
PS1-DERLAND

ONE ENCHANTED EVENING (DUE BACK BY NOON)



BY JEREMY PARISH

When he's not trying to reclaim his vanished youth with obsolete games, Jeremy works as 1UP.com's features editor and charming mascot. Check out his blog at toastyfrog.1UP.com.

The fine art of videogame rental lost its appeal for me during the PlayStation era. Chalk it up to a number of factors—where 8- and 16-bit games had grown steadily more expensive over time (90 bucks for *Chrono Trigger*?! Bastards!), Sony leveraged the low production costs of the CD-ROM format to push prices *down*. The company totally flipped the bird at inflation, which—combined with the rising costs of rentals—meant that it was sometimes more practical to just *buy* the stupid games. Especially those bloated 80-hour RPGs that demanded repeat rentals.

Plus, while the CD-ROM format was inexpensive, it was a far cry from indestructible. Maybe I lived in a city of dull-witted mouth-breathers who thought "proper CD care" meant "scrubbing vigorously with a Brillo Pad," but half of the PS1 games I rented looked like someone had taken them off-roading. Using the CDs for tires.

I asked the manager at Blockbuster once if he'd ever considered printing a label on his games stressing the fact that CD-ROMs are not to be used as chew toys. He didn't really see the humor in it.

Oh, yeah. And there was one other disadvantage to renting: It made replaying the games a little tricky. While the trend during the 32-bit era seemed to be padding game playtime by any means possible, the PS1 still played host to a number of games whose developers were happy to let them be short but sweet—perfect grist for the rental mill.

> IT WAS MORE PRACTICAL JUST TO BUY THE GAMES.

Except...who would only want to play through *Klonoa* just once? What kind of heartless savage didn't want to get both endings in *Metal Gear Solid* and unravel every last juicy tidbit of plot? The higher production values and immersive worlds that the PlayStation brought to the table meant that even brief B-grade games were often charming and entertaining enough to merit a second (or third) go: the perennially underappreciated *Mega Man Legends*, for example, or Atlus' wacky tale of royal puppy police in flying robot armor, *Tail Concerto*.

But rentals still had a place in my life—they were a great way to sample some of the PlayStation's most truly horrendous software. I mean, there was no way I was ever going to spend full price for a copy of *Bubsy 3D*. But three bucks for a weekend? You'd be hard-pressed to find a better deal on so much laughter, heartbreak, and pathos.

Other recommended rentals of horror:

Tail of the Sun, which isn't actually a bad game. It's just very aimless. Very...boring. See what the lack of hype is about! And then rest peacefully when *Tail* puts you to sleep.

Cosmic Race, which normally sent gamers racing back to the store for a refund.

And you can't miss *Punky Skunk*, which should be final proof that Sony didn't completely hate 2D PlayStation games. Apparently, the company just hated *good* 2D games. But Sony was totally cool with this sub-Genesis garbage. For a special bonus, the game's nascent furry fetishism predicted the way the modern Internet leaves you wanting to wash your hands after stumbling across a deviantART page.

That's the kind of feeling money can't buy...but it *can* rent. I

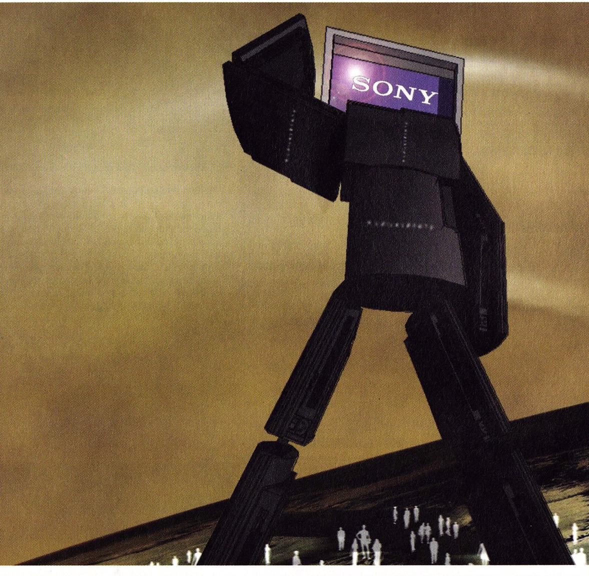
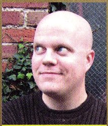


Illustration: Brian Stryzek



JOE RYBICKI remembers when "console war" meant fighting with his siblings over who got on the Odyssey next. Want to accuse him of being a corporate shill and/or Sony fanboy and/or raving lunatic? Send your thoughts to opm@ziffdavis.com.

IN MY DAY...

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

Six-hundred dollars is a lot of money. This goes without saying. It's a lot more than any of us were expecting to have to pay for a PS3, even with all those extra bells and whistles shoehorned in. Sure, when you adjust the price for inflation, it's not much more than some of the most successful game systems of history cost at launch. It still does feel like an awful lot of money to pay for a machine that plays games.

This is news to no one, I understand.

What I don't understand is why this news has prompted such an outpouring of Sony hate. It's as though Mr. Sony came to the houses of thousands of message-board-dwelling fanboys and personally kicked each and every one of them in the junk. And so they swarm over the Sony colossus, seeking out glowing weak points—real and imaginary—and stabbing furiously.

For example: In a recent article on the tech-centric news site The Inquirer, a reporter crowed that the PS3 hardware was "slow and broken," citing a slide in a Sony presentation that appeared to indicate that the Cell processor reads local memory at a speed orders of magnitude slower than it writes to local memory. Which is true. It's also utterly irrelevant: As one developer put it in a follow-up article at GamesIndustry.biz, "You never, ever need to access that memory from the Cell."

This is the kind of thing I'm talking about. Critics are grasping at fanciful straws to try to imply that this time—oh, yeah, baby!—Sony is *totally* going down.

Why? Yes, the system will be expensive. But is it expensive enough to justify this kind of visceral, violent reaction? My guess is that it's psychological, a David-versus-Goliath mentality that makes people want to see the powerful brought low.

Now, I'm not saying that Sony is impervious to failure. It's happened before; look, for example, at Nintendo's position in the market today as compared to its dominance in the early '90s. Back then, the terms "videogame system" and "Nintendo" were virtually synonymous. And now Nintendo is the smallest slice of a very large pie. So yes, it can happen. But I don't think a high price tag on the next console is sufficient to significantly diminish the kind of dominating market lead the PlayStation brand currently enjoys. Temporarily, maybe; I'm sure this holiday season will see the race running a lot closer than Sony is used to. But in the long run? I just don't see it happening. In fact, I suspect that some real competition might just sweat any complacency out of Sony, making the company fight that much harder for your gaming dollar. After all, competition always benefits the consumer.

I could be wrong. We should know in a year or two whether the PlayStation brand is stronger than the price-aversion reaction. Until then, I can guarantee one thing: This will be a very interesting battle.

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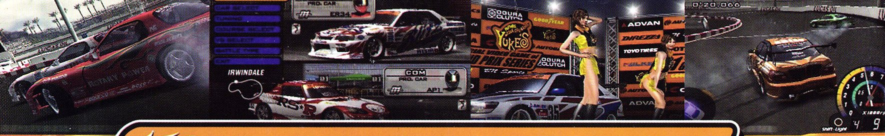
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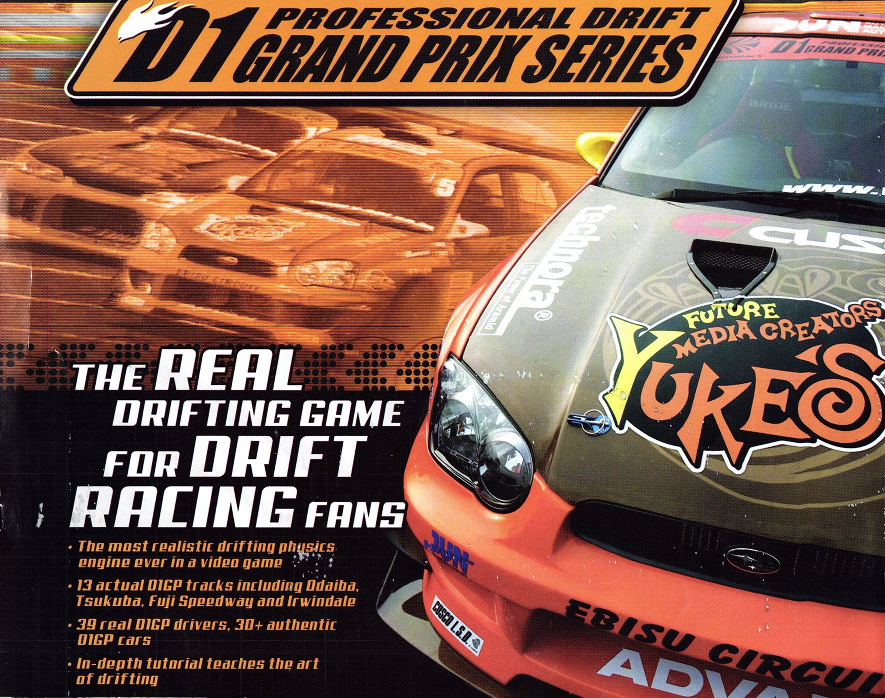
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